Fibromyalgia: Turning a Diagnosis into a Treatment Plan

Give Whole-Person Care
Fibromyalgia is sometimes called a diagnosis of exclusion. This is medical jargon for a name that explains a cluster of symptoms for which no underlying cause has been identified. Sometimes medical care centers around sleuthing the underpinnings of the disease and consequently delays treatment. The good news is that an underlying cause is not necessary to start treatment. Alternative medicine can offer the treatment-based, whole-person care that patients with fibromyalgia need.

Use Protocols
Even when the underlying cause of fibromyalgia is undetermined, practitioners of alternative medicine can extend patients' treatment. Dr. Jacob Teitelbaum has organized a treatment plan in his newly updated book From Fatigued to Fantastic. His Sleep, Hormones, Infections, and Nutrition (SHIN) protocol walks patients and practitioners through effective symptom-based treatments:

- **Sleep:** Don't be afraid to get a solid eight hours of sleep a night! Dr. Teitelbaum's book's clear and thorough explanation of prescription sleep aids and medical conditions common among those with fibromyalgia makes it a helpful resource. Alternative medicine practitioners can improve fibromyalgia by developing a treatment plan to improve patients' sleep. This, in turn, will improve the patients' metabolism.

- **Hormones:** If nutrients are a symphony, hormones are its conductors. Most patients improve with adrenal hormone support. Supplemental hormone therapy can help recovery from fibromyalgia so the body can again synthesize its own hormones adequately.

- **Infections:** With fibromyalgia, viral and fungal infections seize liberties to multiply, thereby worsening fibromyalgia. Dr. Teitelbaum gives suggestions on breaking vicious fibromyalgia-infection cycles.

- **Nutrition:** Patients everywhere ask, "Doc, what can I take?" However, it's the rare day when a patient asks, "Doc, what should I leave out to improve my condition?" Tell people to cut something, and they think you are referring them to a surgeon. Dr. Teitelbaum's book outlines dietary "don'ts." He explains how some foods are anti-nutrients and should be cut. He also covers nutrients that are commonly deficient or needed in larger amounts in patients with fibromyalgia, thereby guiding patients on what they can take.

Optimize Protein
Give your patients protein – not a steak dinner, but supplemental essential amino acids. Recommend patients begin a trial of 5 grams of essential amino acids on an empty stomach twice a day, for one month. The majority of my patients with fibromyalgia have insufficient protein for their body's needs. In addition to thinning hair and brittle nails, they may have muscle atrophy, even in the midst of obesity – a condition known as sarcopenic obesity. They often have low levels of the neurotransmitters serotonin, dopamine, and GABA, which the body synthesizes from protein. Muscle repair following exercise may also be delayed.

What causes the inadequate protein? Most patients are eating the recommended protein, generally calculated as 0.8 grams per kilogram of body weight. It is only a few who are trying to lose weight, have recently changed diets, or are experiencing dental pain who eat insufficient protein. In other words, fibromyalgia increases the body's need for protein.

Fibromyalgia is muscle pain, and pain is the body's universal response to damage. In other words, fibromyalgia is ongoing muscle damage. The more muscle damage, the more protein the body needs to repair the damage. Muscle pain can double the body's protein requirements. In addition...
Fibromyalgia Treatment Plan

To the fibromyalgia pain, patients may have infection, strains, or an immune system that is aberrantly damaging muscle. Each of those conditions increases protein needs. Fibromyalgia is also associated with poor digestion of protein. Low stomach acid and inadequate secretion of pancreatic enzymes both impair protein absorption in the gastrointestinal tract.

Dr. Teitelbaum describes how fibromyalgia is associated with low levels of the hormones DHEA and testosterone. These two hormones are instrumental in delivering dietary protein to muscles. An increase in dietary protein can help compensate for the low hormone levels. Also, supplemental DHEA and testosterone require adequate dietary protein to be fully effective.

I routinely treat fibromyalgia with 5 grams of essential amino acids twice daily. It is important to clarify important concerns about supplemental protein. Supplementing essential amino acids does not increase the intake of animal products or protein-rich foods in general. Neither does it significantly increase the kidneys’ burden of nitrogen waste. Don’t overlook inadequate protein in patients with fibromyalgia, because this is a treatable symptom.

Treat Medication Side Effects

You may be familiar with a children’s song, “There was an old lady who swallowed a fly.” The situation quickly escalates when the lady then swallows a spider to catch the fly, and so on. Unfortunately, patients with fibromyalgia can draw analogies to the song. Here are some common examples:

- Fibromyalgia may be treated with antibiotics. The antibiotics can lead to yeast infections and fungal overgrowth. This can then lead to intestinal permeability sometimes called leaky gut and food allergies. This, in turn, worsens fibromyalgia.

- Fibromyalgia may be treated with prednisone. To preserve bone health during the course of prednisone, the patient may be prescribed a bisphosphonate. The medication can irritate the stomach to the extent that acid-blocking medications may be prescribed. The suppressed stomach acid, in turn, reduces absorption of vitamin B12. Suboptimal levels of vitamin B12 can worsen fibromyalgia.

- Fibromyalgia symptoms may lead to a medical workup and identification of an unfavorable lipid profile, for which a statin medication is prescribed. The medication can lower coenzyme Q10 and interfere with testosterone synthesis; both can exacerbate fibromyalgia.

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Take a Medical History to Identify Potential Underlying Causes

Make a thorough medical history part of your fibromyalgia protocol. The history often provides the most information about tailoring the patient’s treatment. The process can discover underlying factors such as toxin exposures, nutrient deficiencies, gastrointestinal symptoms, chronic musculoskeletal strain, and medication interactions.

I would like to share how a medical history helps me not only tailor a patient’s treatment plan but also identify and correct what were likely to have been underlying causes of her pain. This 67-year-old woman consulted me to help prevent worsening osteoporosis during her fibromyalgia treatment. She had been advised by her doctor to take 1,000 to 1,500 mg of calcium daily to protect her bones. She did this, but the calcium she took had no magnesium or other bone minerals. The high dose of calcium likely reduced the absorption of dietary magnesium, created an imbalance between calcium and magnesium, and led to intermittent constipation. All three of these conditions can reduce optimal muscle function over time.

The second underlying factor was a medically created hormone imbalance. The patient had been prescribed Premarin as part of her osteoporosis treatment some years earlier. Along with the oral estrogen, she used a topical progesterone cream. Her doctor discontinued the Premarin based on concerns that emerged in the medical literature. However, her progesterone cream purchased over the counter was not discontinued, and she had continued its use without estrogen for a year. The salivary hormone analysis I then ordered showed a normal estrogen and extremely high progesterone.

As soon as we adjusted this patient’s calcium and magnesium levels and lowered her progesterone, her fibromyalgia symptoms improved. Within one month, her body was able to repair itself from five months of fibromyalgia. She became pain-free.

Save Money

Alternative medical treatments for fibromyalgia can be expensive. One way to lower their price is with a prescription pad. A prescription for items such as massage, a massage chair, a mattress, mold abatement, full-spectrum lighting, vitamin supplements, and an infrared sauna exempts these items from sales tax. With a prescription, the purchase of the item also represents a medical deduction on state and federal income tax, which can be detailed by the patient’s tax preparer. Practitioners who are not authorized to write prescriptions can tell patients the rationale, which they can then describe to their prescribing practitioner.

In conclusion, a diagnosis of exclusion requires a treatment of exclusivity. Fibromyalgia is a condition that is especially responsive to the symptom-directed, whole-person care of alternative medicine.
