HALLMARKS OF FIBROMYALGIA

1. Widespread, diffuse pain lasting longer than three months. Pain is most often bilateral and is present in all four quadrants of the body. It is important to remember that not all widespread pain is fibromyalgia.

2. Tenderness in 11 (or more) of 18 tender points at the same time. The criteria of 11 of 18 specific fibromyalgia tender points were originally meant to screen patients for clinical study and not as diagnosis. It remains a useful guideline.

3. Fatigue and sleep disturbances. One client said, “Even first thing in the morning, it’s like I’ve been walking in chest-deep water all day long. I have no energy to get up and do anything.” According to the Mayo Clinic, “People with fibromyalgia often wake up tired, even though they seem to get plenty of sleep. Some studies suggest that this sleep problem is the result of a sleep disorder called alpha wave interrupted sleep pattern, a condition in which deep sleep is frequently interrupted by bursts of brain activity similar to wakefulness. So people with fibromyalgia miss the deep restorative stage of sleep. Nighttime muscle spasms in your legs and restless legs syndrome also may be associated with fibromyalgia.”

4. Cognitive effects, often called fibro-fog. One patient described it as “Feeling permanently brain dead, like I was seriously zonked out on too much Benadryl.” Fibromyalgia patient Melissa Roth commented that she knew she was in for a bad day when it took two hours to pack her daughter’s lunch box. There is debate as to the exact cause(s) of fibro-fog, but the lack of restorative sleep definitely contributes to the problem.

5. Delayed reaction to a pain stimulus, and reaction that is out of proportion to the actual stimulus. According to Starlanyl, “In fibromyalgia you have delayed, inappropriate and exaggerated autonomic nervous system responses to an external or internal stimulus that has long passed.” The Mayo clinic reports that this heightened level of sensitivity can include odors, noises, bright lights and touch.

6. Fibromyalgia patients are often told to exercise; however, unaccustomed exercise can become yet another pain stimulus that their central nervous systems overreact to.

   One said, “I did a gentle aerobics class like my doctor said. I felt pretty good, and three days later, I couldn’t move. I didn’t get up for four days, and I’m not doing that again!”

   I call this the rebound effect, and understanding it is critical to using bodywork with fibromyalgia. It’s important to note that the “rebound effect” comes from your central nervous system, not your muscle fibers. If you have localized pain, rather than widespread diffuse pain, it is not being directly caused by fibromyalgia, but fibromyalgia can and does amplify the local symptoms.

Fibromyalgia Syndrome (FMS)

Fibromyalgia affects 2% of the population, 3-6 million people in the U.S alone. There is no known cure.

Symptoms:
- Pain and stiffness in muscles and joints
- Chronic widespread pain
- Tension headaches
- Irritable bowel syndrome
- Numbness and tingling of extremities
- Possible underlying conditions:
  - Psychological stress
  - Biochemical abnormalities in the CNS
  - Altered serotonin
  - Spinal arthritis
  - Rheumatoid arthritis
  - Immune or endocrine abnormalities
  - Lyme disease

**Anterior Trigger Points**
- Low cervical vertebrae (C5, C6, C7)
- Second rib
- Lateral epicondyle
- Knee (medial patellar ligament)

**Posterior Trigger Points**
- Occipital scalp (sinuses)
- Supraspinatus muscle
- Trapezius muscle
- Gastrocnemius (tibialis)