

Fibromyalgia is a chronic pain illness characterized by widespread musculoskeletal aches, pain, stiffness, soft tissue tenderness, fatigue, and sleep disturbances. Multiple tender trigger points may be palpated in the neck, back, shoulders, pelvic girdle, and hands.

An estimated 5-7% of the U.S. population has Fibromyalgia. Fibromyalgia has a serious impact not only on the patient but their families, friend, and employers as well because of its debilitating nature.

The pain associated with Fibromyalgia is profound, widespread, and chronic. “It knows no boundaries.” It varies in intensity and may also include numbness, tingling, and burning. The severity of pain may be affected by cold/humid weather, non-restorative sleep, physical and mental fatigue, excessive physical activity, physical inactivity, anxiety, and stress.

The fatigue felt by fibromyalgia patients is described as an all-encompassing fatigue that interferes with even the simplest daily activities. “It feels like every drop of energy has been drained from their body.”

The cause of Fibromyalgia remains a mystery although medical findings continue to bring a better understanding closer and closer.

Treatments for Fibromyalgia include a lifestyle adaptation, pain medication, alternative treatments, nutrition, relaxation techniques, and exercise.

Pain management is the key concern for many affected. This may be achieved by managing sleep, psychological support, and other treatments such as: Physical Therapy, Therapeutic Massage, Myofascial release therapy, Shiatsu Massage, Light Aerobics/yoga/pilates, acupuncture, application of heat or cold, relaxation exercises, breathing techniques, and nutritional supplements.

Medical professionals are recognizing the important role touch therapies are playing in patients suffering from fibromyalgia for managing pain, fatigue, depressed mood sleep problems, muscle tenderness, headaches, stress, and anxiety. Touch therapies promote a relaxation response in patients, which allows for a state of deep rest that changes the physical and emotional responses to stress (e.g., decrease in heart rate, blood pressure and muscle tension). Touch Therapy disciplines that can have this effect on the body are Massage Therapy with lighter to medium pressure, Reiki, Shiatsu, and Foot Reflexology. The relaxation response induced by the many forms of touch therapy is crucial in helping patients overcome chronic pain.

While medications help patients cope with the devastating symptoms of fibromyalgia, touch therapy enables the body to heal and function better. Researchers at the Touch Research Institute University of Miami have studied adults with fibromyalgia and the effects of massage therapy. The results reported reduced anxiety and uplifted mood immediately after a massage session. Sleep quality improved and other fibromyalgia

symptoms such as pain, stiffness and fatigue were relieved as well. Researchers say that massage therapy alters the sleep pattern, increases serotonin levels and reduces levels of the chemical messenger for pain.

As we educate the fibromyalgia community and physicians of the benefits of the many Touch Therapies, we provide options and avenue for each individual to take an active role in their wellness. Science is confirming what we know in our hearts: intentional, caring touch is good medicine. It can create hope, ease the symptoms of disease, and calm the body and soul.