

An Introduction to  
FIBROMYALGIA

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# Fibromyalgia

## What Is It?

Fibromyalgia (fye-bro-my-AL-gee-ah) is an arthritis-related condition that is characterized by generalized muscular pain and fatigue. The term "fibromyalgia" means pain in the muscles, ligaments and tendons. This condition is referred to as a "syndrome" because it's a set of signs and symptoms that occur together.

Fibromyalgia is especially confusing and often misunderstood condition. Because its symptoms are quite common and laboratory tests are generally normal, people with fibromyalgia were once told that their condition was "all in their head." However, medical studies have proven that fibromyalgia does indeed exist, and it is estimated to affect about 2 percent of the U.S. population today.

In 1990, the American College of Rheumatology, the official body of doctors who treat arthritis and related conditions, finally legitimized fibromyalgia in the medical community by presenting its criteria for diagnosing it. It is diagnosed when the you display the following symptoms:

- A history of widespread pain (pain on both sides of the body and above and below the waist) that is present for at least three months
- Pain in at least 11 of 18 tender-point sites.

## What Causes It?

No one knows what causes fibromyalgia. Researchers speculate that many different factors, alone or in combination, may cause fibromyalgia. For example, factors such as

- An infectious illness
- Physical trauma
- Emotional trauma
- Hormonal changes
- Muscle abnormalities
- Neurotransmitters

Studies have suggested that people with fibromyalgia have abnormal levels of several of the different chemicals that help transmit and amplify pain signals to and from the brain. Whether these abnormalities are a cause or a result of fibromyalgia is unknown

## What Are the Symptoms?

Although no two people with fibromyalgia experience the same symptoms the exact same way, people with fibromyalgia do experience similar symptoms.

- Pain is the most prominent symptom. It usually involves "**tender points**" on the body where pain seems the greatest.
- Fatigue and sleep disturbances occur in about 90% of people who have fibromyalgia.
- Depression and anxiety is common in many people with fibromyalgia.
- Cognitive difficulties or **fibro fog** can occur, characterized by feelings of confusion, lapses in memory, word mix-ups and difficulty concentrating.
- Migraine headaches, abdominal pain, bloating or alternating constipation and diarrhea (*irritable bowel syndrome*), skin color changes, tingling limbs, jaw pain (*temporomandibular joint (TMJ) disorder*), and restless leg syndrome are common.

## How Is It Diagnosed?

The difficulty with diagnosing someone with fibromyalgia is that there is no clear-cut test to determine fibromyalgia. No evidence of it appears on X-rays or in laboratory test results.

There is no diagnostic marker in the blood. People with fibromyalgia often look healthy and have no outward signs of pain or fatigue.

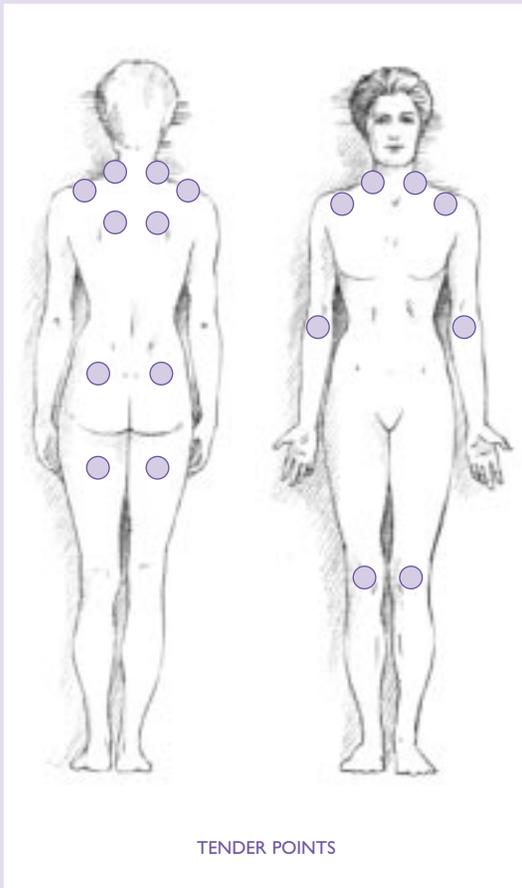
Instead fibromyalgia is diagnosed by the identification of symptoms - the presence of widespread pain in combination with tenderness at specific locations, and chronic fatigue - and the exclusion of other conditions. Doctors use laboratory tests to rule out other conditions with similar symptoms, such as thyroid conditions.

The diagnostic process can take years, partly due to the fact that fibromyalgia remains unfamiliar to many people, including doctors. Fortunately, a greater understanding of fibromyalgia now exists within the medical community. Finding the right doctor can help expedite diagnosis. A rheumatologist or other doctor who is very familiar with this condition is important.

## ACTIVITY

### Tender Points

*Tender points* are areas of the body that are sensitive to pressure. Although fibromyalgia is diagnosed by finding pain in these specific tender points, people with fibromyalgia may experience pain and tenderness virtually all over the body.



#### WHERE DO YOU HURT?

The 18 tender points doctors examine to help determine a diagnosis of fibromyalgia are shown on the above left image. Using the image on the right, mark your tender points and where you hurt the most.

## Treatment Options

Current treatment options for fibromyalgia include:

- **Medications** to diminish pain and improve sleep;
- Exercise programs that stretch muscles and improve cardiovascular (aerobic) fitness;
- Relaxation techniques and other measures to ease muscle tension and anxiety;
- Educational programs to help you understand and manage fibromyalgia.

Your doctor can tailor your treatment plan to meet your individual needs. Some people with fibromyalgia have mild symptoms and need very little treatment once they understand what fibromyalgia is and how to avoid what worsens their condition. Other people, however, require a comprehensive care program, involving medication, exercise and training to help them cope with pain.

## Medications

A number of medications have been used to improve sleep in fibromyalgia. The oldest of these is amitriptyline (Elavil), a medication first used to treat depression. Amitriptyline and related medications probably work by improving the quality and depth of deep sleep rather than by any effect on mood. Although it probably works as well as any of the other medications, amitriptyline causes frequent bothersome side effects such as weight gain, dry mouth, daytime tiredness, and trouble concentrating more often than other medications with durations of action more appropriate for sleep so I usually try these other medications first. They include trazodone (Desyrel), diphenhydramine (Benadryl), cyclobenzaprine (Flexeril), alprazolam (Xanax), and carisoprodol (Soma).

Medication is started at a low dose and gradually increased until you sleep well at night and feel good during the day, encounter unacceptable side effects, or reach the prescribed maximum dose. Starting low and slow helps minimize initial side effects such as dizziness, nausea, and morning grogginess. By two to four weeks, most patients find that the side effects are settling down and the fibromyalgia symptoms are starting to improve.

It often takes a lot of fiddling with the dose to get it exactly right. It may be necessary to try several medications in succession or sometimes in combination. Some patients find that certain of these medications cause stimulation rather than sedation, as if one has had too many cups of coffee. When this "paradoxical effect" occurs it will be necessary to switch to another medication. Some medications may become less effective over time and the dose may then need to be increased slightly. Most patients will need to continue medication indefinitely, although sometimes the dose can be reduced once a good response to treatment has been achieved.

Some patients report that they find various herbal and other "alternative" remedies helpful. While I can't recommend such treatments because they haven't been adequately studied for efficacy or long term harm, I don't discourage patients from using them if they find them helpful. I would encourage you to try treatments for which there is scientific proof of efficacy

first, though. The large majority of alternative treatments appear to be of no use or have no more than a placebo effect and are simply a waste of money.

## **Regular sleep**

Patients with fibromyalgia must try to get to bed by the same time every night and get an adequate amount of sleep (anywhere from 1 to 12 hours depending on the individual). Staying up just one hour late may cause an exacerbation that lasts for several days. Many patients with fibromyalgia are worse with the change to or from Daylight Savings time. To avoid this problem, try to make the switch in fifteen minute increments every few days instead of by one hour over one night. I have had little success getting patients truly feeling well who work shifts that prevent them from having a consistent bedtime or require that they sleep during the day.

## Exercise

Both daily gentle aerobic exercise and stretching exercises are important. While patients who try to do too much exercise too soon or of the wrong type will make themselves temporarily worse, most patients who don't begin a daily aerobic exercise regimen will never notice much improvement. Aerobic exercise is defined as exercise that gets your heart rate up to a target heart rate for the duration of the exercise period. It is very important to count your pulse and not just guess. If your pulse is too low or too high, you may be just wasting your time or even causing harm.

Heart rates are measured in beats per minute. It is accurate enough for our purposes just to take your pulse for 6 seconds and multiply by 10. Your aerobic target heart rate is calculated from the following formula:

$$(220 - \text{age} - \text{rhr}) \times .6 + \text{rhr}$$

where age is your age in years and rhr your resting heart rate, determined by taking your pulse when you wake up but before getting out of bed. Good places to feel your pulse are at the side of your neck or at the end of your forearm just the base of the thumb-wrist turned palm up, next to the large bone on the thumb side at the end of your forearm. If you are exercising hard enough you should be able to feel your heart beating and can just count that. For most people, the aerobic target heart rate is at about the point where they can no longer sing but can still talk comfortably.

Exercise seems not to work through conditioning of muscles but rather through a direct, possibly hormonal effect on pain and sleep, which explains why you don't need to exercise painful muscles for the pain in them to decrease. Daily exercise is essential. Patients who have been exercising regularly and then miss a day usually find that their fibromyalgia symptoms are worse for the next day or two. If you are only exercising every other day you may never notice any benefit.

It may take trying several different kinds of exercise before finding one or more types that agree with you. Popular kinds include walking, a water exercise program, regular or exercise bicycles, other exercise equipment, and \*gentle\* aerobic dance. Jogging, vigorous aerobic dance, and weight lifting are too strenuous for most patients. If your pain is mainly in your legs or back, exercise just your arms or try exercising in the water. You may need to cut back on exercise on days that you are feeling worse.

While many patients may get a lot of exercise at work, doing housework, or in their yard, it is rarely the helpful kind. Effective exercise must result in a sustained elevation of the heart rate, and these incidental kinds of exercise are usually stop and go and may instead increase your pain. You need to set aside a time specifically for daily exercise.

Particularly if you are out of shape, start out with just 3-5 minutes of exercise and gradually increase as tolerated, shooting for twenty to thirty minutes. Take a few minutes to stretch your muscles, then start out slowly, increasing to full speed after a minute or two. Slow down again for the last minute or two and repeat the stretches. Here are five recommended stretches, each done for 20 seconds a side. They should be gentle and painless. Hold onto a tree or post for support for #s 3-5:

- 1) Shrug your shoulders in a circular motion.
- 2) Reach your arm over your head and bend to the opposite side.
- 3) Bend forward with your legs straight.
- 4) Pull your foot toward your buttock with your hand while standing on the other leg.
- 5) With your feet flat on the ground and one foot ahead of the other, lean forward, bending just the front knee.

Exercise is most effective if done in the late afternoon or early evening. If you absolutely can't do it then, exercising earlier in the day is better than not exercising at all, but you will probably

need to exercise longer for the same effect. Don't exercise just before bed as this may interfere with sleep.

Some patients find that exercise provides an immediate benefit, making them feel more alert and comfortable for several hours. If you experience this effect, you may want to try exercising on awakening and at noon as well. Some patients for whom this works may eventually not need medication.

Stretching exercises such as those described above are often very helpful to decrease muscle stiffness and pain. When fibromyalgia patients have been immobile for long periods, for example in bed at night or on long car rides, their muscles tend to get stiff and painful. Stretching exercises and heat can be particularly helpful at these times. Massage may also be very beneficial. Many patients find that weekly massages greatly help the pain and stiffness, but unfortunately insurance usually does not cover massage therapy.

## **Avoid physical and emotional stress**

Too much physical activity of the wrong kind will make you feel worse. Rather than doing housecleaning, yard work, or other physical activity all on one day, break up the task so that you do a half hour or an hour every day until it is done. While it is difficult to learn to do this, it is essential that you be able to sense when you have reached your limit and stop. By pacing yourself, you will be more productive overall. You need to be able to say no to family and friends when you are not up to some outing or other activity. Don't take on extra responsibilities if you can avoid it.

Stress also worsens fibromyalgia symptoms. If you have ongoing problems with depression or anxiety, consider seeking help for them from your family doctor or a psychiatrist. Anxiety and depression may arise as symptoms of fibromyalgia and in turn cause insomnia, leading to worsening of the underlying problem. Relaxation techniques or a chronic pain program can also help lower your stress level and are of proven benefit in treating fibromyalgia.

## **Treat other sleep disorders**

Several other sleep disorders besides insomnia may aggravate fibromyalgia. Almost half of men with fibromyalgia and some women have obstructive sleep apnea. In this condition the patient snores loudly and has periodic pauses in breathing after which he starts breathing again with a snort. Periodic limb movements of sleep is a condition in which patients jerk or kick every 30 to 90 seconds for long periods during the night and is also frequent in FMS. Patients may be completely unaware of either of these conditions until the spouse complains. Not only will it be difficult to get fibromyalgia symptoms to improve without treating other sleep disorders, but if sleep apnea is left untreated it may lead to injury or even premature death. Be sure to tell your physician about these problems if you notice them.

Other common sources of repeated sleep disturbance are a spouse's snoring and young children. If the spouse drinks alcohol in the evenings or is overweight, then avoidance of alcohol after supper or weight loss may eliminate snoring. Avoiding sleeping on the back will often help. At the very least, the patient can wear earplugs. Children are harder to put off but fortunately most soon outgrow their need for care at night.

## Miscellaneous factors

It is important to avoid prescription tranquilizers and sleeping medications of the benzodiazepine group other than alprazolam (Xanax) as well as alcohol in the evening. While these may help you get to sleep, they suppress deep sleep and therefore often make fibromyalgia symptoms worse the next day. Narcotic pain medications have the same effect and should be avoided -- they may help the pain but they also may keep you from getting better. Even anti-inflammatory medications like ibuprofen interfere with sleep a little, which may explain why they haven't been shown to help fibromyalgia in controlled studies. Tylenol and Ultram have the least effect on sleep and are preferred for pain.

Some patients have noticed that certain foods may trigger fibromyalgia symptoms much as they may migraines. Some have found that a diet low in fats, fried foods, and simple sugars helps. If you suspect that some food make you worse, try avoiding it and see if that makes a difference.

Patients with fibromyalgia should probably give up caffeine completely. Even one cup in the morning can sometimes disrupt sleep at night and may directly increase muscle pain and headaches. If you are drinking more than a cup a day you should taper yourself off caffeine-containing beverages over two weeks or so to prevent headaches and other withdrawal symptoms.

## FIBROMYALGIA DRUGS

Fibromyalgia features one of the longest lists of medications used in its treatment, but none of the medications used for fibromyalgia were actually developed for the condition or even approved by the FDA for treating it.

Nevertheless, a number of medications have shown effectiveness in randomized clinical trials of people with fibromyalgia; those are the drugs listed in this chart. These include the antidepressant medications such as amitriptyline (*Elavil, Endep*), duloxetine (*Cymbalta*), fluoxetine (*Prozac*) and paroxetine (*Paxil*); muscle relaxants such as cyclobenzaprine (*Cycloflex, Flexeril*) and certain analgesics, including tramadol (*Ultram*).

The combination of 20 mg *Prozac* taken in the morning and 25 mg amitriptyline taken at night also has shown effectiveness in easing symptoms throughout the day and helping to ensure sleep at night. Some preliminary studies using anti-seizure medications such as gabapentin (*Neurontin*) and the experimental drug pregabalin are also demonstrating promising results in helping to ease pain, promote sleep and relieve fatigue.

You'll find some other drugs used for fibromyalgia in the charts on analgesics and NSAIDs. For many people with this painful condition, an NSAID or analgesic such as over-the-counter acetaminophen provides sufficient pain relief; others take an NSAID or analgesic along with one or more of the medications listed here.

## Pain Management Techniques

While researching Fibromyalgia, I learned a lot of different things about pain. I have the usual "over 30" daily aches and pains, and my husband is just reaching that point; but how do you recognize that this is something that isn't just going to go away? Some of the Fibromyalgia patients remember "growing pains" as a child where they laid in bed at night with a heating pad and cried. There's a good possibility that their fibro symptoms had started that early (this does not mean that everyone with growing pains has Fibromyalgia).

Some of the patients started feeling the constant pain with the onset of a trauma, such as a car accident... or even emotional trauma, such as divorce or childhood abuse. With some, it just started one day, and two weeks later was so bad they had to go to the doctor. Also, with Fibromyalgia, there are some days better than others... and some days with "flares" that are so bad the patient can't stand for a sheet to touch their body. So, once you realize that you have something wrong with you that is going to cause you pain... what do you do?

I'd like to share with you some of the things the Fibromyalgia patients I've spoken with have shared with me. Then I'd like to add to the script in last week's article and help you with a hypnotherapy method for pain management. At the end of the article, I will give you a short hypnosis technique that you can do in five minutes. Try these different approaches as "YOU" feel like doing them. Just because something works for someone else, doesn't mean it's perfect for you. If you have any questions, especially with exercises, please ask your physician.

Some of the patients do gentle stretching exercises to keep their muscles and joints more limber and toned. This is an excellent idea and doesn't take more than a few minutes. Another great suggestion was water aerobics or low impact aerobics in the senior's class because they understand pain more and go at a slower pace. Again, do what you are able to do... no more. Some of the fibro patients use Yoga. Yoga doesn't have to be a head-stand routine where you have to balance for an hour. The benefits of yoga go beyond exercise into the areas of meditation, relaxation and focus.

Another friend receives Acupuncture. Along the same lines of eastern healing methods, I highly recommend Reiki, a Japanese method of energy healing that treats the body, mind and spirit. One especially great thing about Reiki is that anyone can be attuned by a Reiki Master, and you can treat your physical symptoms yourself at Level I. Also suggested, was Massage Therapy.

Now let's try some Hypnotherapy.

**Pain Management Script:** (One note: In hypnotherapy, we do not use the word "pain" while hypnotized... pain hurts... we use "discomfort"... it puts the mind on a more susceptible level, not thinking about "pain.") (begin) Just imagine yourself in your magical place of relaxation... you hear water gurgling in the background and look to see where it is coming from... you notice a beautiful waterfall pouring into a mirror clear pool... there is a large, soft float near the edge... just go over now and lie down on the float and drift into the pond... there is no reason to feel any fear of water here... this is just our imagination at work... you are completely safe... and relaxed... just like a beautiful dream...

You begin to feel something enchanting about this place... you realize that this water has healing powers... it is warm... and calming... healing... allow the water to wash away any discomfort that is left in your body... and it floats away... gently cleansing... renewing... you can feel the healing energy flowing through every cell of your body... allow it to work... allow the water to take away everything negative in your mind, body and spirit....

The discomfort slips away like a distant memory... when you return, your discomfort will be under your control... all you have to do is take a deep breath, close your eyes, and remember this place and the feeling that you have at this moment... your mind has the power, and your thoughts are the greatest of all healers... (end)

At this point, you may drift on to sleep by finishing the script for sleep therapy, or allow yourself to wake up simply saying to yourself "and when I awake, I will feel refreshed and have more energy than I've had in a very, very long time"... count to five and open your eyes.

Once you practice this and come to a point where you can ease the discomfort without completing the entire script, I use a technique where I visualize a sliding scale. On this scale, there are numbers from 1-12 and a red arrow that slides up and down. See the number where your discomfort is presently, and imagine it sliding down the further your "discomfort" subsides... then imagine yourself with a hammer and nail (or whatever you want) and nail the red arrow into place at the lower number. Most of my pain management clients can be into hypnosis in five minutes and have that arrow nailed down to at least 1 or 2. Remember the three most important words in self-hypnosis... practice, practice, practice.

You can add any visualization or positive suggestions to these scripts that you like. Be creative, and use your imagination. If you prefer a beautiful green valley to lie down in, imagine yourself there and allow the earth to soak away the pain... imagine the sun's rays healing your body. Sometimes I stand on top of a mountain and allow the wind to whisk the discomfort away on the breeze. Use whatever works for you, and enjoy many more pain-free days of life.

## Sleep Therapy

Your muscles, joints and glands are swollen, burning and painful... you may feel symptoms of depression and/or anxiety... you are exhausted... you find it harder to concentrate and form coherent thoughts (mental fog)... it gets more difficult to complete your normal, everyday tasks... you may experience irritable bowel syndrome or symptoms of arthritis... your senses may become heightened to a point where the slightest sound hurts your ears... it may become difficult to focus your eyes... sleep becomes a thing of the past.

Is this a syndrome, a disease, or a virus? You finally take that first trip to the doctor's office. You may be diagnosed with one of several diseases and put on a prescription regimen for depression and pain. Does it work? Have you been misdiagnosed? Are the drugs you are taking helping or making you sleepier and more fatigued?

This is the battle of Fibromyalgia. If you, a family member, a spouse, or a friend have Fibromyalgia, you are already more than too familiar with the symptoms. My goal with this article is to help you find alternative methods to help you cope with this disease. One point before we go on is that hypnotherapy or any other holistic therapy should never replace your physician's care, but should be used in conjunction with your health care routine.

While researching for this article, I spoke to many friends who are coping daily with Fibromyalgia and Lupus. These diseases have quite a few of the same symptoms. The one thing that really stood out in my mind is the problem with sleep. Why is a good night's sleep so very important to us? Once you reach your deep sleep period, your body begins to restore, heal and refresh itself. Several times during the night, our sleep patterns fluctuate between light and deep sleep. Our deep sleep is the time when we dream and experience REM (rapid eye movement). This also our time of deepest healing.

What happens if we toss and turn so often during the night that we do not reach our deep sleep cycle? The body and mind do not rest, refresh or heal. So, you wake up the next

morning feeling as if you never slept at all. The wonderful thing about hypnotherapy is that you can reach "deep sleep" and experience "REM" in about 10-20 minutes. After a half hour hypnosis session (yes, even self-hypnosis), you can feel as though you have had a complete 8 hours of sleep. You can also use self-hypnosis to drift into your regular sleep at night, sleep through the night, and wake in the morning feeling better than you ever have.

I usually start the hypnosis session with progressive relaxation. Since we are also dealing with a disease, I'd like to change it just a little bit.

**Sleep Therapy Script:** Start by just closing your eyes down... take a deep breath... hold it... and exhale slowly... one more time... with each and every breath, you will experience a growing sense of calm and peace in your mind and body... you let go and allow yourself this time... for you... and you alone... allow your body to respond naturally... one more nice, deep breath... and relax.

I want you to picture yourself right now, just as you are, right where you're laying... get a good mental image... you will notice that there is a beautiful, white light... so white, sparkling with beautiful tones of violet... radiating around your body... you feel this pure, positive energy... this is a very healing energy, and I want you to allow it to flow in and out of your body... allow it to heal...

Just imagine now that this energy begins to flow from the very top of your head... and immediately, you begin to relax... as this pure, relaxing energy flows into your forehead, it becomes the most beautiful shade of indigo... it flows down into your eyes... your eyes become very heavy... you couldn't open them if you tried... your cheeks relax... your lips... your chin... your jaw... completely relaxed... if your mind wanders, just allow it to happen...

This beautiful energy flows down into your throat now... becoming the most lovely shade of blue you have ever seen... you can feel it's healing power... down into your shoulders... relaxing more and more... the relaxation flows down into your chest... as it nears your heart, the light becomes a brilliant, healing green... detach yourself now from any thoughts of the outside world at all... and relax even more...

The energy continues to flow through your back muscles... making them numb and warm... your arms begin to feel heavy and limp... they relax at your sides... completely relax... heavy and numb... the relaxation flows down into your ribs... right above your belly button... the light becomes yellow... it continues to flow... into your diaphragm... your breathing is so rhythmic and easy... the light becomes orange...

Almost every muscle in your body completely relaxed... your mind is at ease... your body is numb... this feeling flows down into your hips... the healing light becomes a beautiful red... the energy flows down into your thighs... your knees... your calves... your feet... and right to your toes... your legs are heavy and numb... there is no feeling or discomfort whatsoever... you are completely relaxed and comfortable...

Now find yourself in your most serene place in the universe that you can possibly imagine... imagine yourself lying there asleep... see yourself... completely relaxed... completely comfortable... asleep... allow yourself to be in this place... allow yourself to sleep a full 8 hours... and wake in the morning feeling fully rested... every muscle relaxed and refreshed... feeling better than you have ever felt before. (end of script)

I hope this exercise finds you with many nights of peaceful sleep. In the next article, I will add a couple of steps to this one to help with pain management. The more you practice self-hypnosis, the better you become. Before you begin, you may want to have a nice cup of warm chamomile tea. Some of my Fibromyalgia friends have recommended **Kava Kava** or **St. John's Wort**. I like to play music while I am in hypnosis... it is definitely not critical especially if your ears are bothering you. These scripts can also be taped ahead of time and simply played after you lie down at night so you don't have to memorize them.

## Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy

Recent findings have dispelled the belief that fibromyalgia is a psychosomatic disorder. It has a rather short history as a physical disorder, only achieving that status a mere 15 years ago. Fibromyalgia is often foreshadowed by a physical and/or a psychologic trauma. For many years, much to the distress of its sufferers, fibromyalgia's etiology lay hidden in a mire of unanswered questions. Some researchers believe that disturbances in the "autonomic and endocrine stress response systems may underlie the etiology" of this agonizing condition (Millea, et al, 2001). According to Millea and colleagues (2001), "fibromyalgia is a rheumatologic condition characterized by spontaneous, wide spread soft tissue pain, sleep disturbance, fatigue and extensively distributed areas of tenderness."

Researchers are beginning to appreciate and analyze the complex relationship between the biochemical, physiological and psychological components of the disorder (Flemming, et al, 1997). Flemming and colleagues suggest that fibromyalgia is sympathetically maintained pain, which develops from an injury or illness. The illness or injury becomes "linked with the fight or flight mechanism, which is known as the sympathetic nervous system." It is not known how this relationship is established, however, once established the pain may become chronic. Normally, when an injury heals-- pain, our biological alarm system, no longer serves a beneficial purpose. Consequently, the resultant pain subsides. This normal progression to wellness does not happen in fibromyalgia. It is possible that chronic pain also has a benevolent objective. However, since we are currently ill equipped to decipher its message, chronic pain is considered a medical "pain in the neck" by physicians and suffers alike.

## **Co-morbid conditions**

Fibromyalgia is often accompanied by "fatigue, headaches, irritable bowel syndrome, and insomnia" (Worrel, 2001). In addition, the more debilitating examples of fibromyalgia are frequently found in individuals with a history of depression. According to Worrel, "Elevation of cerebrospinal fluid substance P levels (a neurotransmitter associated with enhanced pain perception) is found in a significant number of fibromyalgia cases." Other disorders, such as hypothyroidism and myofascial pain syndrome, can mimic fibromyalgia. Fortunately, hypothyroidism can be ruled out by a simple test.

## Chronic Pain Management

Many management techniques are used to treat fibromyalgia. Treatments are often combined in a comprehensive treatment package to obtain the most relief for an individual patient.

Some types of pain can be treated by "purely psychological means such as relaxation training or imagery exercise" (Fleming, et al, 1997). Guided imagery is used to help the patient relax, which facilitates healing. This technique is used in hundreds of hospitals around the country to treat various medical conditions. It is also commonly employed in psychotherapy settings, pain clinics and it is available on self-help tapes and CDs.

Anxiety and stress have a negative impact on fibromyalgia patients. Millea (2001) suggests that pain flare-ups can increase the patient's stress load; conversely, environmental stress can initiate a pain flare-up. Relaxation guided imagery is a powerful tool when employed to soothe patients and minimize their response to stress. Health care providers need to hear their patients' stories about the challenges of living each day with a chronic pain disorder. Feeling heard and understood by their physician or therapist is an essential condition of an effective treatment. A chronic disorder necessitates a partnership in which the medical professional works with the patient to choose the most beneficial treatments. According to research this may include some non-pharmacological treatments such as Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT), relaxation techniques and massage. A recent study published in the Journal of the American Medical Association suggests that the treatments demonstrating the most promise for "patients with chronic fatigue were graded exercise and cognitive therapy" (Whiting 2001).

Chronic fatigue is frequently a comorbid condition with fibromyalgia. The Mayo Clinic uses a multidisciplinary treatment program, which includes psychotherapy to treat fibromyalgia. They employ a 1½ day intensive schedule. It appears that even this very brief program improves symptoms in 70 percent of their patients (Worrel, BA et al, 2001). In a recent study, CBT offered an alternative approach that demonstrated clinically significant improvement within six weeks (Edlinger, 2001). In another study, on chronic fatigue syndrome, the researchers compared standard treatment with cognitive therapy and standard treatment without cognitive

therapy. "Seventy-three percent of the cognitive group were spending less time in bed and functioning normally after a year" (WebMD Health). Only 27% of the other group experienced the same gains. Flemming (1997) suggests amplifying standard treatments' efficacy by including bodywork and relaxation.

According to the eminent wellness physician, Dr. Andrew Weil, guided imagery tapes are useful in reducing pain and speeding the healing process. In addition, something as simple and straightforward as an accurate diagnosis can legitimize the patient's experience. Patients are relieved to discover they have a legitimate medical disorder and the pain is not imaginary. In a study on low back pain, researchers found that relaxation response training was effective in reducing pain severity. Twenty-eight of the patients also had fibromyalgia. Many of the study subjects reported reduced pain and a reduction in other symptoms, as well as "improved function and general health" (Millea, 2001). One panel of experts concluded that relaxation techniques were helpful in managing chronic pain. Furthermore, the techniques were valuable in managing the stress inherent in living with a chronic pain disorder. Yet another study suggests that patients who believe they have little control over their symptoms report more severe and chronic fatigue. CBT is helping patients to change their inaccurate, self-defeating beliefs and regain a sense of control over their lives. A belief in one's ability to manage one's disorder frequently becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. CBT and relaxation therapy (a part of CBT) offer a non-pharmacological treatment option for treating chronic pain. In summary, according to the research studies, CBT and relaxation can be used to enhance one's coping ability, relieve pain, encourage restful sleep patterns, increase one's sense of control and well-being, reduce fatigue and improve general health. Cognitive-behavioral therapists can be found through CBT organizations such as the Association of Cognitive Behavioral Therapists at [www.nacbt.org](http://www.nacbt.org) online

## **A Walking Program for Fibromyalgia**

When I was first diagnosed with fibromyalgia in 1991, I was told that the treatment was antidepressants and mild aerobic exercise. After five years of living in denial, trying to burn the candle at both ends, I was told by my specialist that I had to slow down or I was going to become worse. As I look at all the information on the Internet about fibromyalgia now, I've come to the conclusion that there are as many different treatments for fibromyalgia as there are people.

There is no cure, but there is one thing that each one of us can do in order to help our symptoms of pain and fatigue, and that is to exercise. That is, if we don't have any other conditions which prevent us from following an exercise program. Consulting with our physicians about beginning any exercise program is very important, and beginning slowly and pacing ourselves is the basic requirement.

All of the researchers and physicians who are actively working towards a cure of fibromyalgia and treating patients with compassion and understanding recommend some type of exercise. The choice of exercise that we do depends upon what we enjoy doing, what we've done in the past, and how we go about doing it. For example, spending thousands of dollars for a treadmill and having it sit collecting dust isn't going to help us if we don't use it. Also, beginning a swimming program that costs money and requires us to drive and arrive at a pool at a certain time isn't going to help us if we don't enjoy getting wet, driving several days a week, and then taking the extra time to shower and dress again.

Springtime is upon us, and it means longer days, more sunshine, and an opportunity to get outside and walk. Walking is one of the easiest activities that each one of us can do, and its only cost is the price of a good pair of shoes. I recently purchased a Prevention Magazine, and found a very simple walking program for getting started.

During the first week, the duration of the walk is only 10 minutes, it is done three times in that week, the intensity is moderate, which means enough to get your heart pumping but not enough to leave you out of breath, and the speed is whatever is comfortable. The second

week is walking four times during the week for 15 minutes each time, and the only change is to walk as if you are in a hurry. The third week is walking five times for 20 minutes at the same speed as the second week, and the fourth week is walking five times for 30 minutes.

Stepping outside and walking five days each week for only 30 minutes doesn't seem like much exercise, but it certainly forms a pattern that may help us to either increase our activity, or at least give us some exercise each week. Keeping it up is the difficult part, so it helps to schedule a particular time each day in which to walk, walk with a friend or enjoy your solitude, look around at the beauty of new growth, smell the flowers in bloom, watch birds and animals, and breathe in the fresh air. It is important to make it a regular part of your day, just as you would bathe or pick up your email. Marking a calendar with the days that you are going to walk and then crossing the activity off as you finish your walk is a great motivator.

Once the pattern of walking becomes a part of your daily routine, you can either increase the duration or the intensity of the walks, or just keep it at your own comfort level. The important thing is to remember to just do it on a regular basis and not make it a stepping stone to run a marathon. Even if you can only walk for 30 minutes five times each week, it is better to do this on a regular basis than to expect yourself to be jogging, running, lifting weights, or spending an hour each day wearing yourself out trying to do what you were able to do prior to developing fibromyalgia.

Walking not only helps to keep our muscles in condition, but it also will benefit our stress levels, give us some time to get outside and enjoy nature or even just smile at our neighbors. We may be surprised at our increase in energy levels, our sleep may improve, and even our daily activities may become easier over time.

So, check with your physician about beginning a walking program, and see if it helps to decrease your pain and fatigue levels. Once walking becomes a part of your daily routine, the dusty treadmill might be used during the winter months, or you might decide to begin another type of exercise program when the weather changes and tends to keep you inside. Even if the weather is poor, it is possible to walk for 30 minutes around your home. It may not be as

interesting, but once the routine becomes a daily pattern, it is possible to turn on some music, set a timer, and just walk around your home.

Walking will not cure fibromyalgia, but it may be the beginning of feeling that you have some control over your pain and fatigue, and also help with strengthening your muscles, plus giving you a great sense of accomplishment.

So, before you sit down to cruise the Internet, put on a good pair of walking shoes, step outdoors, and see if you feel better about yourself and life in general.

## **An Energetic Look At Fibromyalgia**

My dad has high blood pressure. He has gotten more refunds, discounts and free stuff than anyone I know. He will haggle about the cost of an item or the quality of services rendered. He is also not put off by taking someone to court if he feels he has been swindled in any way. I kid with him, calling him a professional complainer. To him, however, he sees it as kind of a hobby. What he doesn't see is the relationship between his actions and his high blood pressure.

When we experience pain or discomfort, our bodies are saying to us "Excuse me, there is something wrong, I'm imbalanced and I want to move back into balance. Disease, on the other hand, is the body's way of saying "HEY! I have something I want you to pay attention to. I've been trying to get you to notice me for months. Now you HAVE to take care of me."

Fibromyalgia is also a call for us to take care of our bodies, to make changes in our lives.

What is Fibromyalgia? Fibromyalgia is a disease that afflicts 7 to 10 million Americans. A person is diagnosed with Fibromyalgia if they suffer from chronic pain in the muscular system for over 3 consecutive months. Currently, there is no known cause and no proven cure for Fibromyalgia. It appears energetically as toxins in the muscular system of the body.

Each of us normally stores some toxins in the body. We have all experienced this when we feel tender spots in our necks and shoulders when someone is giving us a massage. These tender spots, kinks or trigger points are places in the body where we hold on to unwanted or repressed emotional energy, with the toxins representing the physical manifestation of the issue.

When we injure ourselves or activate one of our trigger points, the nerves in the body respond by releasing a chemical called ATP. ATP is interpreted by the brain as pain. According to Depac Chopra, the brain can trigger the releasing of ATP merely by having a particular kind of

thought or feeling.

The bodies in Fibromyalgia sufferers are unable to process the ATP. It is not flushed through the system through the regular metabolic processes. As a result, the surrounding nerves are then triggered, causing them to release ATP also. This triggering continues like dominoes, until the entire muscle group or the entire body is involved. The body is then left with this backup of toxins that are trapped in the body until they are flushed through the system, thus restoring "normal health".

When looked at Fibromyalgia clairvoyantly, the underlying issue that I see surrounding this disease is that the sufferer has been the giver or healer, so to speak, throughout their lives. They are the ones to give away the last slice of bread at dinner even though they are still hungry; the one to care for a sick friend or relative even if they are running a fever; the one who will work on a project, even though they do not support it emotionally, doing only because they were asked. Now while being a giver is a wonderful thing, these individuals are being sent the message in no uncertain terms; "You need to take care of yourself!"

There are a number of things that one can do to help curtail the pain associated with Fibromyalgia by reducing the level of toxins in the body.

First is Exercise. Now while adding exercise is not something that many of us look forward to, there is one key benefit that it can provide. Exercise, no matter what kind including walking, stretching, or riding a stationary bike causes the muscles to increase the level of oxygen and blood that flow through the muscles. This increase in circulation helps the body to flush the toxins that are trapped within them. One minute of exercise a day is far better than no exercise at all.

Massage, while not as effective as exercise, is another great way to increase the circulation within the muscle groups. Massage is especially good at assisting you to work on the trigger points in the body.

Relaxation, mediation, and energetic healing such as Reiki, are a great way in which you can release unwanted energy from the body, breaking up some of the underlying emotional issues that keep the toxins and trigger points in the body.

Baths. As our society speeds up, and everything needs to be done fast, taking a nice long hot bath is quickly becoming a thing of the past. Baths are a great way of assisting the body to release energy. Try adding Epsom salt, sea salt or even baking soda to your bath water. When looked at it energetically, the water, especially when combined with the salt or baking soda, assists the body with releasing toxins from the skin; it relaxes the muscles, and helps to draw the "energy", which doesn't belong to you, out of the body. It not only feels good, it's good for you.

Take a look at what you're putting into your bodies. Are you eating a lot of processed foods? Do you drink coffee, tea or coke? Does your diet consist of canned and frozen foods, McDonald's and Taco Bell? Do you smoke? What we want to do is decrease the amount of toxins in the body, not support them.... Drink lots of water to assist in the flushing of the toxins out of the body.

Try writing down or journaling what you were eating, feeling, or doing just prior to an attack. Look for a pattern in your thoughts, feelings and actions. Try it, I think you will be truly surprised by what you find.

If you suffer from Fibromyalgia, imagine for a moment that your husband, wife, child or close friend were afflicted. What would you do or say to assist them in making these kinds of changes in their lives? Now is your opportunity to turn all of that nurturing inward and take care of yourself. So take care of yourself! Give yourself permission!

## Creative Imagery & Healing

Our bodies do not discriminate between sensory images in our minds and what we know as reality. What does this mean? Imagine for a moment that you were in a car accident (perhaps you have been), and you injured your neck. Months later, as you are driving down the road, you hear someone's tires squeal. This immediately causes you to tense up....your neck hasn't bothered you in a couple of months, but all of the sudden, it begins to hurt... you feel very nervous. Your mind learned to associate that sound with being hurt.

Can the same association be used to create a positive effect? Yes, and because we respond more strongly to positive stimuli than to negative, the benefits can be extremely powerful. A college professor decided to do a small study with his class on the effects of guided imagery: He divided his class up into three sections... the first section was to do hand exercises, the second was to imagine themselves doing hand exercises, and the third group did no exercises. The results? There was little difference in gained hand strength between the group who did the hand exercises and the group that imagined themselves doing the exercises.

Creative visualization can heighten immune functions, lower blood pressure, speed healing, alleviate depression, reduce perception of pain, lower fatigue, increase relaxation, just to name a few. How does it work? Creative visualization is much like self-hypnosis, except you want to practice until you can actually SEE what you want to happen. Once again, you can use the progressive relaxation script to take you into hypnosis and simply add to it. The script we have used up to this point will have you in your favorite place at this point:

**Healing Script:** Now, imagine yourself floating up from wherever you are... you float up above the trees... you feel very safe... as you look below, you see a beautiful mansion... you can sense the healing vibrance of this place... you want to go there, and you do... as you walk up the beautiful front stairs, your body begins to feel differently... you feel a subtle shift deep inside yourself...

You find yourself standing at the front of a great hall... on each side of the hall stands mirrors... hundreds of mirrors... lining both sides of this enchanting place... as you stand before the first mirror, you reach to touch the wood... you can actually feel it beneath your fingertips... you see a figure in the mirror... this person is part of you... it is the part of you that is completely healed of any disease or discomfort... imagine yourself now, reaching into the mirror...

You take this person's hand... as you lead them from the mirror, the person steps across and becomes a part of you... you can feel the strength of healing that this being has... your body feels stronger... you step to the next mirror... (end)

In the hall of mirrors, you can imagine that the person in the mirror has any characteristic that you want! Imagine one mirror at a time... confidence... love... healing... warmth... relaxation... the simply reach out your hand, and bring that person into your life. These techniques are as effective as they are simple. One more thing I'd like you to know at this point is "You do not have to believe that this will work" for it to work.

Another form of Creative Visualization is Guided Imagery. One thing about the Guided Imagery techniques is that you do not have to go all the way through the progressive relaxation and into hypnosis (I do believe it is more effective that way, just not necessary). You can take a few minutes out and visualize your body healing. To do it this way, you do need to know something about how your disease effects your body internally. Let's use Lupus for an example.

With Lupus, the body's immune system goes out of control (this is definitely a layman's description) and works too well. The doctor prescribes medicine that shuts your immune system down, leaving you susceptible to every germ that crosses your path! Lupus patients are another group that knows a great deal about their disease. When you know that much about how your disease effects your body, you can visualize the body working the way it is supposed to work, i.e., visualize the cold cells all being a special color (say pink), then visualize yourself drinking a glass of water (your preference inserted here), and imagine that "water" washing away all the "pink" germs. You can simply close your eyes and imagine this

anytime at all, without going into self-hypnosis, and it works. Also, with a little conversation with your doctor, the two of you can probably work out a visualization exercise tailored to heal your specific illness.

AIDS and Cancer patients have had the most success with this that I have ever witnessed!

There is a wonderful book called ***Staying Well With Guided Imagery*** by Belleruth Naparstek. There is a script in the book for Immune Cell Imagery, and many, many others, including a good deal of energy work. Remember, though, that Guided Imagery should be used if you understand quite a bit about your disease, and how exactly it effects your body, organs, cells, blood, etc.

Since this article is on healing, I'd like to briefly introduce you to Reiki. Reiki (RAY KEE) is a Japanese form of hands-on energy healing that uses the practitioner as a channel for the energy to flow into the client's body and heal. The Reiki energy has the ability to heal all the way to the DNA, and intuitively knows where the body needs to be healed. Reiki not only heals the physical body, but also the mind and spirit. I believe that is so important when dealing with a disease that the way you feel mentally and spiritually is also addressed.

How do you find a Reiki practitioner or teacher? To practice Reiki, one must first be attuned by a Reiki Master. One great thing is that anyone at all, of any faith or background, can be attuned to Reiki. You can find someone to either treat you, or teach you to treat yourself. Be careful, however, that you are dealing with someone reputable. The best resources to find a Reiki Practitioner or Reiki Master would be your local Chiropractor, Health Food Store, Massage Therapist or through a friend. If you would like to email me, I would love to answer any questions you have or help you find someone in your area.

Reiki can be used for AIDS patients, Cancer patients, Fibromyalgia, Lupus, Arthritis, all the way down to the common cold, or simply for preventive therapy. At Reiki Level I, you can treat your own physical symptoms and the physical symptoms of other people, animals, plants, etc.

You can also combine these two therapies, Hypnosis and Reiki, and have a powerful healing tool. I often tape a relaxation or pain management session and play it in the background of the Reiki session. These are also both techniques that you can learn to use yourself in the privacy of your own home. You are the most powerful tool in your healing. During this research, I found that Fibromyalgia patients often know more about their disease than their physicians do. You are often experimenting with your own modes of therapy with great success. I hope these two tools can assist you on your path to health and healing.

## Managing Daily Activities with Fibromyalgia

Those who don't deal with fibromyalgia on a daily basis have a very difficult time understanding why people who have it can't always remember things, get exhausted from doing simple activities, or have pain so severe that all we want to do is try to find a comfortable position so we can just have a few pain free moments.

A friend of mine wrote these words to me many months ago, and to me they sum up our experiences with an activity that most people just take for granted.

"I remember I used to 'cook dinner', and it was no big deal. Now I have to 'think' about what I'm going to fix, then I have to 'think' if I really want to thaw something out or just have soup because I hurt so bad. Then maybe I decide I'll fry that chicken, so then I have to go to the freezer, and it's not an upright, so I have to lift the lid, and find something to prop it open. Then, of course, the chicken is on the bottom, so I have to pick everything out of there which is cold and frozen, until I find the chicken. Now that I've found it, I have to put everything else back. Then I take the chicken to the microwave and put it on defrost. Then I suppose that I have to cook potatoes to go with the chicken. Now I have to walk back to the laundry room, get the potatoes, bring them back to the kitchen table, where I sit down for a minute because the pain in my shoulders just won't quit. I've forgotten the knife, so I have to get up, which really hurts. I never want to get back up after I've sat down, but I get the knife, and sit back down and peel the potatoes, which takes a little time because my fingers and hands hurt so bad. Once that part is done, I have to go get a pan, take it to the sink, fill it with water for the potatoes, wash the potatoes, cut them into pieces, and put them in the pan. The pan is very heavy at this point, so I may ask for help carrying it or just go for it, depending on how bad my hands are. I haven't even gotten to the chicken yet or set the table. Most people just do this stuff automatically every night, while the people with fibromyalgia just have to take it one step at a time, and it can be grueling. The same thing happens when I go out for dinner. I never sit in a booth because it hurts so bad trying to get up, so now we always ask for a table. There are just so many adjustments that we have to make just to 'get through' a day."

Then there's laundry, errands, or light housework which must be done by someone. In my family, I'm the designated someone since I always did these things before developing fibromyalgia. My children do their own laundry, but trying to haul a load of my husband's and my dirty laundry down to the basement from the upstairs is exhausting. If I do it when one of my children is at home, I may get help if I ask, and occasionally one of them will actually offer to carry it for me. Then there is the problem of several family members trying to do laundry at the same time. With each person having their own laundry basket, it should work, but it doesn't all of the time. I find my half dried laundry thrown on top of the dryer since one child needs their clothes dry before work or school. Then there is the issue of the towels. I did tell them that I wouldn't wash their towels anymore since they are too heavy for me to carry, but what I find is the towels in the master bathroom being used by them because they have run out of towels.

Family conferences are a necessary evil, and they only work when all members are willing to do their part, or when all members are home at the same time in order to sit down and explain the rules over and over again. It is extremely frustrating to be the only member of a family who is living with pain and fatigue, yet is expected to organize a family conference, set the rules, and try to have the energy to follow through with them.

Before I developed fibromyalgia, these problems weren't as exhausting for me, but now it is too much work to have to continually explain why I can't or shouldn't do something. I'm praised for fixing a nice dinner, yet the dishes are left on the sink for me to do before I go to bed at night. The dusting just isn't done, and even though two of my family members have allergies, they don't make the effort to do it.

As my friend wrote, just thinking about preparing a meal can be exhausting, but actually doing it can be painful and it becomes a major chore rather than something pleasurable to do.

Living on disability, only one salary, or having to work in spite of dealing with fibromyalgia can become emotionally and physically exhausting for us. Those who have to work in order to have a roof over their heads, food in the cupboards, or clothes on their backs can mean that there is little energy left over for activities of normal daily living. Those who don't have

fibromyalgia can't seem to understand why we aren't more organized, or why we don't just hire a housekeeper, or force our children and spouses to do more chores.

It is emotionally exhausting to have to continually remind people that we just can't do certain things. Sometimes it is easier to either just not do them, or force ourselves to do the minimum of chores so that our homes don't become overwhelming with dirt or clutter.

We may be mourning for the lives that we once had, yet since our pain and fatigue is usually invisible to those around us, we don't always receive the understanding which we desperately need. I've been told by many well-meaning friends to get my family to help more, but they aren't living my life for me. It is difficult enough to just get through some days without people placing greater expectations upon me.

Not only must we change the way in which we live our lives, we must also deal with the losses that we've sustained to our self-esteem. For most of us, we hate to feel like nonproductive members of our families or our communities, but the reality is that we have to stop and think before doing almost anything now. Sometimes the chore seems so overwhelming that it's easier to just do nothing, yet that can lead to depression.

There is no one simple answer for each of us, and we have to learn to listen to ourselves rather than let others tell us how to live our lives now.

## Clearing the Fog

Many people with fibromyalgia experience unclear thinking or cognitive dysfunction. They become forgetful, lose their train of thought, forget words or mix them up. This is what is popularly called fibro fog. There's no known cause for it, and the only treatment for it is following some basic memory and communication tips.

Below are some common-sense pointers that can help you clear the fog.

1. **Repeat yourself.** Repeat things to yourself over and over again. Repetition will keep thoughts fresh in your mind.
2. **Write it down.** Whether you write in a calendar, in a notebook or on sticky notes, if you're afraid you won't remember something, putting pen to paper can help.
3. **Pick your best time.** If there is something you need to do that requires concentration and memory, such as balancing your checkbook or following a recipe, pick your best time to do it. Many people with fibromyalgia say they perform best early in the day.
4. **Get treated.** Depression, pain and sleep deprivation can influence your ability to concentrate and remember. Getting your medical problems treated may indirectly help your memory.
5. **Engage yourself.** Reading a book, seeing a play, or working a complex crossword or jigsaw puzzle can stimulate your brain and your memory.
6. **Stay active.** Physical activity, in moderation, can increase your energy and help lift your fibro fog. Speak to your doctor or physical therapist about an exercise program that is right for you.
7. **Explain yourself.** Explain your memory difficulties to family members and close friends. Memory problems often result from stress. Getting a little understanding from the ones you love may help.
8. **Keep it quiet.** A radio blasting from the next room, a TV competing for your attention, or background conversation can distract your attention from the task at hand. If possible, move to a quiet place and minimize distractions when you are trying to remember.

9. **Go slowly.** Sometimes memory problems can result from trying to do too much in too short a period of time. Break up tasks, and don't take on more than you can handle at once. Stress and fatigue will only make the situation worse.

## **Staying in remission**

While fibromyalgia is not curable, most patients with a little work can make it to the point where they feel substantially better most of the time. Even with good results from treatment however occasional relapses are common, perhaps caused by staying up as little as one hour late one evening, skipping exercise for a day, a disruption in your daily routine, increased stress, a storm front moving in, or often for no apparent reason. You will do best if you give in to it when this happens and try to get extra rest. Hot baths and massage may also be helpful at these times. Try not to stop exercising during relapses, even if you have to back off on the amount a little, and continue stretching. Once you have had a period of feeling relatively well, it is usually possible to get back to that point again by identifying what derailed you and correcting the problem.