

ARE YOU CAUGHT IN THE CONTROVERSY OF PAIN?

FIBROMYALGIA: Difficult to Live With / “Difficult to Diagnose”

[SOURCES: Health Oasis at the Mayo Clinic website and Special Reports at Dr. Koop's website, both easily accessible in the Health and Medical section of the Partnership's *Vital Connections* information portal at www.Vitalco.net Lois Jackman provided a copy of Dr. Rosenfeld's July 18, 1999 article, “When It Just Hurts All Over”.]

Do you wake up in the morning, with muscles so stiff you can barely move? Do you hurt all over and are constantly tired, but have difficulty sleeping? Your doctor has ordered lots of lab work but can't seem to find anything wrong with you? Just like five and one-half million other Americans, you may be suffering from Fibromyalgia.

According to Dr. Isadore Rosenfeld, the disease can attack anyone at any time in their life, but mostly affects women, between the ages of 20 and 40.

If you have had most of the following symptoms for over three months, you may be suffer from the disease:

- **Deep, aching pain in any part of the body-neck, between the shoulder blades, hips, knees**
- **Sleep interrupted several times a night for no reason**
- **Very tired all day**
- **Throat tends to be sore**
- **Attacks of diarrhea or constipation, despite a normal bowel examination**
- **Intolerance to heat, cold or changes in the weather**
- **Abnormal sensitivity to light, odors and loud sounds**
- **Mottled skin.**

Other symptoms include headaches, numbness and tingling in the hands and feet and a sense that muscles are swollen, even though they aren't, according to Dr. Muhammad Yunus, professor of medicine at the University of Illinois. Dr. Yunus conducted the first controlled study of Fibromyalgia in the early 1980s. Dr. Yunus says flatly, “Fibromyalgia is not a psychological condition.” He believes that the disease has more to do with the body's chemistry, citing a chemical imbalance as the cause for the hypersensitivity of patients to pressure, smell, noise and light.

There are many other theories about the causes of Fibromyalgia, as well, but none have yet been proven. Some doctors believe that certain environmental factors, such as stress, poor sleep, physical or emotional trauma, even being “out-of'-shape”, may be at the root of the pain. Some have thought it might be a result of injury to the central nervous system.

Research continues, but there is no consensus other than it is real and debilitating to those who suffer from it.

Dr. Yunus says that sufferers of Fybromyalgia have “sore spots” on their bodies. According to criteria, established in 1990, there are 18 specific sites on the body where these sore spots occur and a patient needs to have at least 11 of them to be diagnosed with the disease. Others dispute the number of “sore spots” required as a basis for diagnosis, and Dr. Yunus hedges on this too by emphasizing that patients need not demonstrate at least eleven points of pain to receive treatment “if they have other symptoms”.

Blood tests given to people who complain of Fybromyalgia’s symptoms often are normal, but may reveal a deficiency of serotonin, a chemical that transmits nerve messages in the brain and whose levels are lower in persons suffering from depression.

There is no known cure for Fybromyalgia, but some combination of the following are recommended by the Mayo Clinic to help reduce the symptoms:

- Stay active, but avoid overexertion and emotional stress—allow time each day to relax.
- Exercise four or more times a week—initially, exercise may increase the pain, but staying with it often improves symptoms. Suggested exercises include 20-30 minutes of walking, swimming, biking and water aerobics in addition to stretching.
- Develop regular sleep hours and keep to the schedule.
- Messages, hot baths and relaxation techniques help some people.
- Others take moderate doses of over-the-counter pain relievers and non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, such as Ibuprofen.
- Some physicians may prescribe antidepressants and sleeping medications.

Dr. Rosenfeld says, though difficult to diagnose, “Fibromyalgia is not all in your head!” No specific inheritance pattern has been established but, if you have it, it is likely that another of your blood relatives has it too.

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