

The Fibro FLARE-A-PY™

by Margy Squires

You're doing everything right from eating **healthy** to light **stretching** and taking **supplements** targeted to support your chronic pain syndrome. When out of the blue, **for no apparent reason**, your pain **intensifies** and you are stopped in your tracks. **Flare attack!**



What's Up With a Flare?

A flare is a sudden change in what's normal for you in terms of increased pain and discomfort. Flares can come at any time and last from one day to one month. Often flares are unpredictable. You wonder, what did I do wrong? Probably nothing. Flares are often part of many chronic pain syndromes in the waxing and

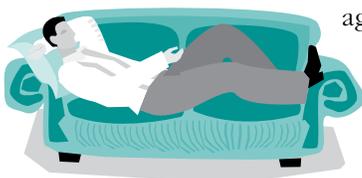
waning of symptoms. You can even have a flare while you are trying to get better; your body's way of saying to you, "I'm confused". And finally, flares are scary. You wonder if you will end up worse than before the flare, and if the flare will stop or if this is what the rest of your life will be like. Flares can involve one region of your body such as your shoulder, low back, legs or arms, or your whole body. Besides pain, you can have increased allergies, anxiety, mental confusion, depression, or other related symptoms. **Flare Exception:** Sometimes you will do something you know will put you in a flare. As Dr. Mark Pellegrino would say, this is "good pain". Although you know it may cause pain, you enjoy the activity enough to withstand the pain consequences that will follow.

During a Flare

So what do you do in a flare? Try a little flare-a-py. That's therapy specifically for a flare. The principle goal of flare-a-py is to get you out of pain and back to your "normal" self as soon as possible.

Rest

Obviously if your flare involves a specific part of your body, say your shoulders, you should rest that area as much as possible. The same holds true for whole body flares. If you broke your leg, would you walk on it? Of course not. You would only use it when it was strong enough to support you



again. If you can't totally rest, try reducing or modifying all activities into steps or smaller parts. Do one load of laundry a day instead

of all of it. Postpone whatever you can get away with until you're feeling better.

Ice vs. Heat

Sometimes a little ice cube on a trigger point works wonders. Most drug stores have different size ice bags for small to medium application. At other times, heat allows a muscle to relax and calm down.



Warm baths with Epsom salts (magnesium sulfate) are also helpful, as well as soaking in a Jacuzzi. Plus, alternating ice and heat application increases blood and oxygen flow to a compromised pain area. Try 20 minutes on ice, 20 off; then 20 minutes on warmth, 20 off, etc. It's your choice. Whatever decreases the pain for you is the right choice.

Pain Medications



If you are not on pain medications, you may try over the counter aspirin, Tylenol® or ibuprofen. Since your brain may be a little cloudy, write down the product, recommended label dosage, the time of day you took it, and at what dosage so you can keep track of what you are taking and what works. If you are already on pain medications, check with your health care provider before making any changes. An anesthesiologist friend of mine once told me to take medications only when you need to and they will probably work more effectively on the pain. You will have less chance of causing lasting side effects, such as gut shut-down, kidney or liver damage, and you are also less likely to become tolerant and require a medication switch. His other rule: increase up and then decrease down when you start coming out of your flare. Only use medication as a last resort when other modalities have been exhausted.

Topical capsaicin helps with pain by reducing substance P, the neurotransmitter within the nerve cell which signals pain to the brain. It ranges from 0.025% (standard) to 0.1% (high potency). Personally, nothing helps David more than

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capsaicin when he is in a flare. It may also be part of the healing mechanism by increasing local tissue temperature which is important for blood flow and other complications of the endocrine function. Studies show that capsaicin even reduces cancer pain when conventional drugs have failed.

Supplements & Herbs

It's highly unlikely that any supplements that were helping you before the flare would have caused your flare or would make it worse. Try to keep your routine as close to normal as possible. During a flare is not the time to change your supplement program. You may, however, need additional magnesium, calcium and/or valerian which eases muscle tension. St. John's Wort can reduce anxiety and lift mood. B vitamins also help with mood, stress, and nerve pain. 5-HTP can modulate pain, mood and sleep. For example, if you currently take 300-400 mg of magnesium, you may wish to increase to 600-700 mg in a divided dose. If you take valerian root extract for sleep, try taking it during the day as a mild analgesic. One woman we know takes her magnesium every other hour during the day (up to 10) to keep the pain in control rather than taking a larger quantity once or twice a day.

Other Helpful Hints

- ◆ Although you may not feel like eating, maintaining proper nutrition will help you come out of the flare sooner in the long run. Your body cannot repair or heal without sustenance.

- ◆ It's a fact that humor and laughter go a long way in relieving pain symptoms by increasing endorphins. So keep your sense of humor. Read a funny book or watch a comedy. If you enjoy being with others, choose people who are happy and positive.
- ◆ Find a flare partner. When you're in a flare, it's good to know someone that you can call and talk to for a little support who understands what you are going through.
- ◆ Try gentle massage or stretching (especially after or during a warm soak), deep relaxing breathing or meditation. Anything that relaxes the sympathetic nervous system may reduce pain.
- ◆ It's possible that your "flare" is not a flare at all. If you have serious pain that in your experience you are not sure is fibro-related, seek medical assistance and don't be shy about it, even go to an emergency room if necessary. While some doctors may want to disregard many fibro patients' complaints of pain, you need to insist on your patient's right for treatment.

Now the Good News

There's always an end to a flare. According to one study by Dr. Mark Pellegrino (who has seen over 15,000 fibro patients), out of 109 patients, "85% returned to their previous stable baseline, and 15% improved but were still higher than their previous stable baseline". Better days are coming!

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