

Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation Treatment of Fibromyalgia

by Mark J Pellegrino MD

Numerous medical professionals and specialists treat fibromyalgia and one specialty in particular, Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, is especially skilled at diagnosing and treating chronic conditions such as fibromyalgia. A physician specializing in Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation is called a physiatrist (pronounced fiz e AH trist). I am a Board Certified Physiatrist who has fibromyalgia, so I deal with it every day on both a professional and personal level.



Over the past 25 years, I have seen and treated more than 25,000 people with fibromyalgia. I wish I could say I have found a cure, but no cure exists yet. However, I always try to help people heal and improve even if their fibromyalgia persists, at least until a cure is found.

My specialty focuses on improving function and a patient's quality of life. In fact, the word *habile* from which rehabilitation is derived is Latin for "to make able again". I feel this word is an embodiment of our unique treatment philosophies and approaches in the diagnosis and treatment of fibromyalgia. The Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation strategy is to empower the fibromyalgia person with abilities to improve the quality of life, even if the condition is still present. My practice slogan is "Reclaim Your Life," which highlights the ultimate treatment goal.



Treatment Goals

We tend to think of people with fibromyalgia as a homogenous group. That is, we all have the exact same thing. Although we all have the same condition, we certainly do not behave in the same manner, nor do we all respond the same to treatment. What works for one person may not work at all for another person. There is no universal recipe for treating fibromyalgia because each of us with fibromyalgia is a unique individual. Thus each of us needs to identify our unique treatment goals that make us become more able again.

There are specific fibromyalgia treatment goals that I identify for each individual even though we are uniquely different. They include:

1. Pain relief. It would be great if everyone could go into remission and be pain free but this rarely happens. Usually the pain decreases, sometimes considerably. Hopefully it decreases to a more manageable level: a more stable baseline level. Some people achieve



remissions where they hardly feel any pain. Any decrease in pain is appreciated even if pain is still present.

2. Functional improvement. Even if a person is unable to resume activities done prior to developing fibromyalgia, one can still improve function and abilities. That is why I like the word *habile*, because it focuses on *making able again* or positive abilities. Too often we tend to focus on the negative or inabilities; things that we used to do but cannot do anymore. Remember *habile!*

3. A successful home program. We live with this condition every day so we should try to find out what works and learn to do it ourselves. It is our responsibility to self-manage our fibromyalgia. We can't sling our doctors and therapists over our backs, carry them with us throughout the day, and slide them off when needed for increased pain. That would hurt too much! We must manage our pain as best we can by ourselves on a daily basis.

Strategies in Treatment

I use a combination treatment approach that is individualized for each person. The following is a summary of each strategy.



Education. This is half the battle. People with fibromyalgia must understand that this condition is not life threatening, deforming or paralyzing, and it is a valid medical condition. The more one learns about fibromyalgia, the more it is understood and the less frightening it becomes.

Medicines. There is no magical medicine to eliminate all fibromyalgia symptoms but many medicines can be helpful in controlling various symptoms. There are three FDA approved medicines for fibromyalgia pain (pregabalin, duloxetine, milnacipran). I often prescribe one of these, along with sleep modifiers, pain relievers and various other pharmaceuticals. I try different drug combinations, and even

Continued

Physical Medicine & Rehab... *continued*



when a good combination is found, the medicines can “stop working” after a while. Rotating different medicines over time can help.

Nutritional Supplements. A variety of nutritional supplements can be used to help the symptoms of fibromyalgia. Magnesium with malic acid, 5-HTP, Colostrum, Vitamin D and others can be beneficial. I often check labs to look for specific deficiencies and advise on certain supplements and dietary modifications based on the lab results.

Physical Medicine Therapy. I like to prescribe a program that may include modalities, manual therapy, and exercises.

- Modalities: Moist heat, bioelectric therapy, ultrasound, aquatics and more. Once the pain has decreased, one can try to progress to a more active program.
- Manual Therapy: Therapeutic massage, myofascial release, soft tissue mobilization and adjustments.
- Exercises: Postural stretches, light aerobic conditioning, strengthening and toning exercises, and aquatic exercises. Becoming more active helps us decrease pain, increase energy and improve our overall health.



Relaxation. Sometimes one of the best treatments to prescribe is relaxation! Deep breathing exercises, guided imagery, biofeedback, yoga, tai chi and prayer are a few examples of relaxation techniques.



Trigger Point Injections. This treatment involves injections into specific painful muscle spasms. People who have regions of particular pain and spasms often respond favorable to trigger point injections. Common injected areas are the neck, trapezius, scapular and low back muscles.

Published in *Health Points*. This article is protected by copyright and may not be reproduced without written permission. For information on a subscription, please call TyH Publications, 1-800-801-1406 or write TyH Publications, 12005 N. Saguaro Blvd., Ste. 102, Fountain Hills, AZ 85268. E-mail editor@e-tyh.com. For information on TyH products, visit our website at www.e-tyh.com

Home Program. Each individual needs to find whatever works best and follow through with a home program on a regular basis. It is our responsibility to live as fully as possible each day despite having fibromyalgia. We hope to find the right tools to reclaim our lives!



SUMMARY

One does not have to be a physiatrist to diagnose and treat people with fibromyalgia. Many doctors and specialists want to help and are open minded and willing to try the best of all available treatment options to achieve the best quality of life with the least amount of pain. Your doctor's job is to help point you in the right direction to better manage your fibromyalgia. You can find a way to do and feel better!

Dr. Pellegrino is a member of the TyH Advisory Panel, as well as a long time friend of David and Margy Squires and the fibromyalgia community.

©Dr. Pellegrino & TyH Publications (M. Squires). Article and pledge adapted from *Fibromyalgia Up Close and Personal*. For Dr. Pellegrino's book, visit www.e-tyh.com.

Articles by Dr. Pellegrino in the TyH Online Library

- ◆ *Colostrum for Fibromyalgia (baby food for adults)*
- ◆ *Dopamine: The Latest Dope on Dopamine*
- ◆ *The Fibromyalgia Diet, Protein Matters*
- ◆ *Mentally Managing Fibromyalgia, Q&A with Mark Pellegrino MD*
- ◆ *Does Your Child Have Fibromyalgia?*
- ◆ *Supplement Q&A with Dr. Pellegrino*
- ◆ *Vitamin D: D-Cisions in Chronic Pain*

For informational purposes only and not intended to diagnose, cure, treat or prevent any medical condition.



Fibromyalgia Patient Affirmation

Copy this Pledge & tape to your refrigerator. Remember *Habile* means you can!

I have a **REAL** condition called **FIBROMYALGIA**.

Fibromyalgia is not a life-threatening, deforming, or paralyzing disease.

I can do many things to **HEAL** my fibromyalgia even if it can't be cured right now.

It won't be easy having fibromyalgia but I will **LEARN** as much as I **CAN** about my condition.

I will use that **KNOWLEDGE** to manage and **GAIN** control of **MY LIFE** with fibromyalgia.