

## Fibromyalgia and Reflexology - Marianne Hunter, Davis, CA

What exactly is Fibromyalgia and how can Reflexology help with persons afflicted with this syndrome? Although there is a growing percentage of individuals who have been diagnosed (it usually takes years of misdiagnosis as well as advice to see Psychiatrists) with Fibromyalgia, it is very misunderstood by many lay people as well as medical professionals.

A definition for Fibromyalgia Syndrome given by The Arthritis Foundation and the American College of Rheumatology states that, "Fibromyalgia syndrome is a common form of generalized muscular pain and fatigue. The name 'Fibromyalgia' means pain in the muscles and the fibrous connective tissues (the ligaments and tendons). This condition is referred to as a 'syndrome' because it's a set of signs and symptoms that occur together."

Fibrositis was the term once used to describe this syndrome because it was generally thought in the medical community that inflammation played a large role in Fibromyalgia (FMS), thus the "itis," meaning inflammation, was the previous ending of the word. Since more research has been done, it has been proven that inflammation is not a significant part of Fibromyalgia Syndrome. It is a form of soft tissue or muscular rheumatism and affects mainly muscles and their attachments to bones.

To meet the diagnostic criteria of FMS, a Rheumatologist tests the patient for widespread pain in all four quadrants of the body that has lasted at least three months and they exhibit tenderness in at least 11 of the 18 specified points. These painful areas are commonly referred to as "trigger points." FMS is still a mystery, its cause is speculated to be a genetic tendency that can be brought on by stress, an injury, and even in some cases, pregnancy. The incidence of FMS has been noted to be greater in farming areas, so perhaps pesticides may also play a part in its onset.

Typical treatments range from antidepressants, (anti-inflammatory medications are usually first prescribed out of a lack of understanding of FMS, however, they are not effective and can lead to intestinal problems), various pain medications and some new drugs which look hopeful. Lidocaine injected into some of the muscular trigger points can also give much needed relief. Since FMS individuals have the side effect of Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, further medication are indicated due to sleep deprivation. Individuals diagnosed with Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, however, don't always have FMS it is the other way around.

What part can Reflexology play in helping the Fibromyalgia client? It is a powerful bag of wonderful techniques that may help many of the symptoms brought on by this confusing syndrome. It may help alleviate the chronic diarrhea or constipation that comes with FMS. The illeocecal valve reflex and sigmoid reflex pinpoints are valuable tools for relieving these ailments. One of my clients, in particular, can have as many as 20 bouts of diarrhea in a day. After working on her illeocecal value reflex, relief is often times

instantaneous. This is wonderful for anyone going through the agony of having to have powder in the bathroom due to rashes caused by this frequent side-effect.

As a Reflexologist who specializes in terminal or chronic pain conditions, several clients who frequent my practice have FMS. They are all quite progressed and never have a moment free from pain. For example, taking a shower is about the extent of the physical activities that some FMS sufferers can undertake. One of my clients has seen many specialists, too numerous to count, and is currently under the care of a very well known Rheumatologist and is one of the few fortunate victims of FMS to have a doctor who fully understands her condition and, is on the cutting edge of research. He fully supports her need to have Reflexology sessions.

Reflexology helps when nausea comes into play, which as any FMS sufferer will tell you, it frequently does. The entire digestive reflex areas are very important for the Reflexologist to work on because Reflux and Hiatal Hernias are common as a result of extremely tight muscles (particularly the diaphragm) and the initial use of anti-inflammatories. The esophagus reflex region offers much needed relief, so it is important to remember all reflex areas related to the digestive system.

Reflexology's most integral tool is its ability to help keep the client mobile and take the edge off of the numerous pain areas that seem to constantly plague them. Some trips to the emergency room or doctor have been reduced due to the strength of the Reflexology. In my practice, these have included: trouble breathing due to muscle tightness in diaphragm (usually they are given a shot of Demerol or oxygen in the hospital), aching joints that used to be treated with cortisone but have been relieved by frequent Reflexology sessions (not long, but often) and with none of the after effects and unrelenting pain.

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