

# Fibromyalgia and Traditional Chinese Medicine

Fibromyalgia is a difficult condition for the people it affects and for Western Medicine to understand and treat. For conventional Western Medicine, there are no laboratory tests for fibromyalgia and no known cure. What is known is that multiple factors such as periods of high stress, over work, physical stresses and sometimes viral or bacterial infections are often implicated in the onset of the disease. Unfortunately multi-factored diseases like fibromyalgia prove to be difficult for Western Medicine to address.

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM for short), on the otherhand, with it's holisitic approach can often provide insight and effective treatments for fibromyalgia sufferers.

## ② **The sources of pain**

According to TCM theory, Qi and Blood (two vital components of our bodies) need to flow smoothly throughout the body for there to be health. If the flow is interrupted, one of the results will be pain. Fibromyalgia is an indication of widespread problems in the circulation of Qi and Blood. There can be several reasons for this, there might be something blocking the channels, there might be not enough Qi or Blood to adequately fill the channels, or commonly a combination of these two problems.

What can cause these states? TCM uses a metaphorical language to describe how strong emotions such as frustration anger or anxiety can block the smooth flow of Qi in the channels. Similarly, infections or even exposure to windy, cold or humid weather can cause blockages in the channels, impeding flow. And overwork, poor nutrition and a lack of sleep affects our reserves leaving the channels depleted.

A TCM practitioner will go through a careful assessment in order to determine the reasons for your pain and the most effective treatments to re-establish the free flow of the channels.

## ② **Measuring TCM's effectiveness**

Currently in the West, research on TCM is still in the early stages. Nonetheless, researchers are starting to evaluate it's ability to treat fibromyalgia pain.

One randomized study found that acupuncture resulted in a clinically significant 25% - 35% decrease in pain for 114 people.<sup>1</sup> A second smaller study looked at acupuncture for people who had found other treatments ineffective. After six sessions, pain, fatigue and anxiety were all significantly decreased.<sup>2</sup>

A Chinese study reported using herbal treatments for 132 fibromyalgia patients. This study found that 82% of those treated saw all of their symptoms resolve and over half of those remained symptom free six months after treatment.<sup>3</sup>



### **Keeping things moving**

As was mentioned earlier, enabling Qi and Blood to flow freely is central in the treatment of fibromyalgia. Non strenuous exercise is an important way to accomplish this. Walking, stretching, yoga and tai chi (taijiquan) are all things you can do to open channels and improve circulation. The key is to find activities that make you feel refreshed – not exhausted – having done them. Activities where you overexert yourself are best avoided as they will consume Qi and create stagnation in the channels aggravating fibromyalgia's characteristic achy pain.

A US pilot study looking at the use of Qi Gong (Chinese meditation and exercise) for Fibromyalgia found a significant improvement in pain and number of tender points for the 20 people who participated. This improvement was sustained for 4 months after the study was completed. <sup>4</sup>

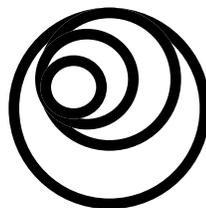
Restorative types of exercise can go a long way to overcoming pain and boosting your spirits and motivation. Find an appropriate activity that you enjoy and do it regularly and in moderation.

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1. *Treatment of fibromyalgia with formula acupuncture: investigation of needle placement, needle stimulation and treatment frequency.* Harris RE, et al. *J Altern Complement Med.* 2005 Aug;11(4): 663-71.
  2. *Acupuncture relieves symptoms of fibromyalgia.* Mayo Clinic Press Release. International Association of the Study of Pain, 11th World Congress on Pain. 2005, Sept.7th.
  3. *The Treatment of 132 Cases of Fibromyalgia Syndrome with Internally administered & Externally Applied Yang Jin Hua Jiu.* Zhang Chun-lei. *Si Chuan Zhong Yi (Sichuan Chinese Medicine).* 2001 (10): 24-25.
  4. Sustained improvement produced by nonpharmacologic intervention in fibromyalgia: results of a pilot study. Creamer PS et al. *Rheumatol Int.* 1998;18(1);35-6.
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### **Disclaimer**

*This factsheet is not intended to treat, diagnose or prescribe. The information provided is not to be considered a substitute for consultation with a qualified health care practitioner.*

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