

Massage, a gentle approach

Massage should be an enjoyable break from pain and anxiety. If touch is often painful to you, your massage therapist will work with you gently and slowly, basing his or her approach on your body's unique response.

You should be aware that any treatment, even massage, is another input for your already overtaxed system. Even if you feel you need deep pressure, gentle sessions of less than one hour may be best for you, especially in the beginning. It could take several sessions to begin feeling the benefits, but with regular massage many fibromyalgia sufferers report substantial and cumulative relief, both physical and emotional.

Communicating with your therapist

Your needs may change from one session to the next depending on how you feel that day, so tell your massage therapist what feels good and what does not. For example, you can choose what parts of your body to uncover, and whether to have any specific area worked. It's possible you will want to direct the focus of a massage to one area, such as your neck and shoulders, and enjoy relaxation extending throughout your body. Try to give accurate feedback about pressure or tenderness as well as fatigue or discomfort after a session.

Your massage therapist may use a variety of techniques based on his or her assessment of your condition. She or he will be happy to explain the chosen approach as well as any specialized experience or training in working with fibromyalgia. Be sure to convey information about symptoms and changes in your health, and be prepared to list your medications since they can affect your response to massage.

Your return to good health

In addition to massage, you can support your healing by drinking plenty of water, getting adequate rest, and listening to your body's warning signals when you need to slow down. Becoming informed is often cited as extremely helpful (some sources are listed below). You may also benefit from a support group, good nutrition, meditation, acupuncture, and stress reduction methods including counseling.

Over time, using the right combination of massage and other supportive measures, you can improve. Pain relief, better sleep, easier movement, and increased energy should be your goals. Your massage therapist can be a caring partner in your return to good health.

Fibromyalgia and Massage



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*Lightening Your
Physical
and
Emotional Load*

Fibromyalgia . . . A chronic and painful condition that can affect every area of your life. If you suffer from fibromyalgia, you probably ache all over and have trouble sleeping at night. You may experience severe fatigue, increasing as the day progresses. And you may be anxious, perhaps even depressed, about feeling the way you do.

If you suspect you have fibromyalgia, you should consult a physician who is experienced with it. Along with medical attention, gentle, consistent massage therapy can help you in managing this difficult and painful condition.

What is fibromyalgia?

Fibromyalgia literally translates as fiber or fibrous (“fibro-”), muscle (“myo-”), and pain (“-algia”). It is defined as widespread pain throughout the body for at least three months, and pain upon pressure in 11 or more of 18 specific tender point sites. Up to four percent of the population have received a formal fibromyalgia diagnosis. Many more have distressing symptoms that indicate they are progressing toward fibromyalgia and could benefit from seeking help early.

Fibromyalgia may come on suddenly or develop over time. There is no single identified cause although physical trauma such as auto accidents or surgery can be a major trigger for its onset. Others may include infections, stress, sleep disturbances, or severe emotional trauma, even from years past.

Lightening your load with massage

Pain and fatigue probably top your list of unrelenting complaints. This alone, especially over a period of time, can make you anxious or depressed, aggravating your sensitivity to pain. Add to this a host of other symptoms such as headaches, insomnia and trouble concentrating, and it’s no wonder your situation may seem more than you can bear.

Lightening your load anywhere will free up physical and emotional resources your body needs to heal. Massage can help in a number of ways.

Pain relief

A vicious cycle of pain may be aggravated by lack of sleep, stress, long periods of sitting or standing, or other physical and emotional factors. You can experience a welcome “pain break” when massage stimulates the release of endorphins, your body’s natural pain killers, which can alleviate depression and insomnia as well. In addition massage increases circulation, which cleanses tissues of uncomfortable fluid buildup and irritating by-products of inflammation. As increased oxygen and nutrition flow to contracted muscles, your muscles can relax, headaches may be eased, and the severity and frequency of flare-ups may be reduced.

Stress relief

Massage calms the nervous system, allowing anxiety to fade, relaxing muscle tension, and slowing and deepening the breath. Stress levels decrease, freeing energy for vital functions such as digestion — needed for maximum healing nutrition throughout your body — and repair of damaged tissue. Knowing there is something you can do to

alleviate symptoms, even temporarily, can also reduce stress by giving you some control over your condition.

Better sleep

Many people report a deeper and more restorative sleep after a massage. Since poor sleep is common in fibromyalgia and contributes to fatigue and muscle tenderness, improving sleep may be vital for you. Feeling relaxed and rested, your sensitivity to pain may be lessened, leaving you with increased energy to regain function and good health.

Emotional support

Your massage therapist understands that you may be feeling very alone. She or he will listen to you and take your symptoms seriously. Massage offers the most basic emotional support —skillful, caring and healing touch.

Support for exercise

Fatigue and pain may make you feel like curling up and staying put. However, consistent and moderate exercise, including stretching, is essential to improvement and can result in decreased pain, increased energy and better sleep. Massage can support you by making it easier and less painful to stretch and exercise appropriately.

Breathing for better health

Many fibromyalgia sufferers have habitually shallow breathing patterns that can aggravate pain and tension, especially in the neck, chest and shoulders. Your massage therapist can help release tight muscles that restrict your breathing and work with you to establish good habits. This retraining along with techniques, such as yoga breathing can be a powerful tool not only to relieve stress and pain, but to increase energy.