

healing fibromyalgia



THE
3-STEP
SOLUTION

- Avoid the Common Triggers
- Reverse Your Symptoms
- Discover Real and Lasting Relief

David H. Trock, M.D., and Frances Chamberlain

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This book is dedicated to Elise, Amanda, and Daniel.

—David H. Trock, M.D.

I dedicate this book to my family for their support
during this long process of “birthing a book.”

—Frances Chamberlain

In the face of uncertainty, there is
nothing wrong with hope.

—BERNARD SIEGEL

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Introduction

If you picked up this book looking for more ways to cope with fibromyalgia, you're in for a surprise. What we propose here is that fibromyalgia is not an incurable, chronic source of pain and misery but rather a temporary and reversible problem that can be fixed.

Just in the last year, a wealth of understanding has grown in the field, along with exciting and effective new therapies, many of which your doctor may be unaware. In addition, new medications have been approved to safely promote sleep and relieve pain in people with fibromyalgia. Physicians also have more insight about proper diet and holistic remedies, and inspiring technological advances have occurred that can revolutionize how fibromyalgia is treated in the future.

In this book you'll discover new diagnostic tools, like the functional magnetic resonance image (fMRI), which measures the body's response to pain; learn about studies proving that fibromyalgia is not a mystery disease but the result of an injury to the brain; and hear about treatments like **virtual reality therapy** and **repetitive transcranial magnetic stimulation (rTMS)**, medications such as **pregabalin** and **duloxetine**, and carefully selected over-the-counter supplements. The good news is that it is possible to recover. People with fibromyalgia are not doomed to a lifetime of suffering!

This may fly in the face of everything you've ever heard before, and it certainly is a new way to look at things; however, remarkable advances in research have provided a realistic path to recovery.

We now know that fibromyalgia falls into three categories—postinjury (including posterior neck compression), postillness, and stress driven. Once you discover the source of your fibromyalgia, you will have a better understanding of the syndrome. A whole new range of treatments and medications will help you to cope with pain and discomfort, and you can develop a plan for recovery.

The days of a doctor writing a quick prescription to treat fibromyalgia symptoms are fading fast. Doctors are working in conjunction with holistic practitioners, and the Internet has become a source of information and education for anyone interested in the neurobiology of pain and stress. As a result, people are more knowledgeable when they visit their doctors' offices and can be active participants in producing successful outcomes.

In the United States, where a woman's life span has been extended to roughly eighty years, it is unacceptable that fibromyalgia still causes so much suffering. Given the demographics of everyone who is affected—five million people in the United States, mostly women between twenty and fifty years of age—fibromyalgia should be a national issue that attracts the same degree of funding

as other highly prevalent conditions. The time has come to put fibromyalgia on the same short list of priorities.

When we consider these five million fibromyalgia sufferers, many of them women in their childbearing years, it's easy to imagine the exponential impact on others around them. People with fibromyalgia may be unable to care for children, have normal relationships with their spouses, or be as productive as they would like in the workplace. The emotional and financial toll is mind numbing. Fibromyalgia is a true hardship for millions of men, women, and children, and it is obviously time to take the condition seriously.

It will take a grassroots effort to ensure that government agencies and insurance companies cover the expense of treating fibromyalgia. Although the fibromyalgia solution presented herein is relatively inexpensive for some people, others may require novel medications or costly diagnostic tools that aren't covered under most health plans.

Fibromyalgia sufferers must also have access to and coverage for nonpharmaceutical treatments. Massage therapy, proper psychological support, and alternative pain-management techniques are just some of the basic types of complementary care that people should be able to receive. The economic consequences of fibromyalgia—unemployment, disability payments, and worker's compensation—clearly demand our attention, and the expense of proper care will ultimately be money well spent.

The support of families and friends is extremely important in a person's recovery from fibromyalgia. You don't exist in a vacuum, and you won't get better in one, either. Spouses, children, parents, and significant friends must become educated about fibromyalgia and must learn to support their loved ones. A lack of understanding, empathy, or compassion on the part of friends and family can be detrimental when dealing with such a complicated syndrome that develops from a variety of factors. If you are a fibromyalgia

sufferer, try to educate people around you. If you picked up this book because you know someone with fibromyalgia and want to support that person, read on and learn all that you can. Women sometimes find themselves not being taken seriously or not being believed because fibromyalgia was, in the past, dismissed as a woman's illness, and because there hasn't been one specific course of treatment.

People with fibromyalgia have more options now than ever before. From this book, they'll gain a better understanding of what may have caused them to develop fibromyalgia, whether an accident, illness, or trauma. They'll also learn about various types of pain generators and look at treatment options. Understanding their symptoms and which of these might overlap with other conditions will help them to recover.

Part I of this book explains exactly what fibromyalgia is, and part II will help you to chart the course of recovery. Each step you take will bring new information, debate, and controversy. The path will be slightly different for each individual, just as the symptoms have varied, but the time has come to embrace new ideas, discuss the possibilities, and explore the realistic goal of complete recovery.

———— PART I ————

The Problem

Fibromyalgia and Its Common Triggers

Fibromyalgia is a syndrome of widespread pain and fatigue. Its underlying causes are many, although in each case the symptoms appear to be driven by injury to the central nervous system. The initial injury may appear obvious at first, like a car accident or a sudden illness, but sometimes the inciting event is more insidious, such as an emotional trauma that occurred months or even years before the onset of fibromyalgia. In some cases, the trauma to the central nervous system isn't a single event but a constant barrage of daily unhealthy stress. While the precipitating factors are too numerous to mention, the symptoms are strangely alike—fatigue and diffuse pain. Overlapping conditions such as irritable bowel syndrome, migraine headaches, and insomnia are also common, and a heightened awareness of external stimuli

(stress, painful touch, loud noise, noxious smells, and bright lights) appears to arise from a phenomenon known as **central sensitivity**.

Fibromyalgia has been a puzzling syndrome ever since it was described as neurasthenia more than a hundred years ago by Sir William Osler:

Neurasthenia appears to be the expression of a morbid, unhealthy reaction to stimuli acting on the nervous centers that preside over the functions of organic life. Sleeplessness is a frequent concomitant and may be the first manifestation, and when the spinal symptoms predominate, the patient complains of weariness on the least exertion. The aching pain in the back or in the back of the neck is the most constant complaint in these cases. Occasionally, there may be disturbances of sensation, particularly a feeling of numbness and tingling.

A century later, we still don't know exactly why someone gets fibromyalgia, but we are now able to document and understand the subtle changes that occur inside the nervous system. Advanced medical technology can identify the hidden abnormalities inside the brain of a fibromyalgia sufferer by using functional magnetic resonance image (fMRI) scanning. We can measure pain messengers such as **substance P** in the **cerebrospinal fluid** and can even track neurotransmitters and the signals that they carry from the brain to various parts of the body. These advances allow us not only to understand, but to measure, someone's sensitivity and reaction to pain and to clarify that fibromyalgia is not a subjective disorder but instead is quantifiable pain and discomfort directly related to an injury to the central nervous system. We have a clearer picture of how certain illnesses and trauma (physical or emotional) can trigger fibromyalgia in a susceptible person. For example, it is now

accepted that there is an association between fibromyalgia and other conditions such as **whiplash**, post-Lyme syndrome, and **systemic lupus erythematosus**. The connection to these conditions is an important discovery. For many years, people with fibromyalgia suffered without having a clue as to why they might have this syndrome. Now doctors are able to evaluate a patient's medical history and come up with a logical explanation for the symptoms. It's a tremendous relief to find a contributing factor because knowing the root of the symptoms can help to determine a plan of action.

An Injury to the Central Nervous System

If you've been diagnosed with fibromyalgia, you probably wonder why this has happened to you. The answer, as far as scientists can determine, lies not in the peripheral muscles and joints where most of the pain is felt but in the delicate cervical spine or in the *brain itself*, where the message of pain is both received and interpreted. Whether the damage arises from a single event or cumulative traumas, infection to the brain, or chronic emotional stress is unclear, but the brain is susceptible to damage from many assaults that are not always obvious.

In fibromyalgia, injuries inside the brain initially involve three areas: the **limbic system**, the **hippocampus**, and the **hypothalamus**.

The limbic system is the most primitive center of the brain, from which feelings of suffering and stress emerge. The hippocampus is a sensitive area of the brain in which memory is stored. It is highly vulnerable to trauma and chronic stress, and it ultimately affects one's learned behavior and response to emotional triggers. The hypothalamus is the master thermostat of the brain, where the automatic functions of the body are regulated; these include arousal, blood flow, body temperature, and hormonal balance.