

Yoga Therapy Research Paper
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Medical and Yogic View of Fibromyalgia

Medical view

Analysis of the condition

Fibromyalgia Syndrome is a very complex illness. It does not appear that the medical field has been able to produce a clear definition or concise description of fibromyalgia. There is a wide variety of possible symptoms and a number of ways that doctors have used to diagnose it.

To describe Fibromyalgia Syndrome or FMS for short, it may be best to start with an understanding of the various parts of the name. "Fibro' means fibrous tissue - tendons and ligaments, 'my' means muscle, and 'algia' means pain. The word 'syndrome' means a collection of symptoms that, when they occur together, identify an illness" (Craggs-Hinton, 4) Perhaps the most efficient way to look at FMS is from the perspective of that last word - as a syndrome, there are many symptoms not all of which may be manifested in a patient. Craggs-Hinton lists a few of these symptoms: "persistent, widespread pain, fatigue, sleep disturbance, anxiety, irritable bowel problems, irritable bladder problems, reactive depression, headaches, allergies, 'foggy brain' and morning stiffness" (4). Symptoms will be outlined and developed in more depth in the next section.

FMS is challenging both for diagnosis and treatment. According to Dr. Don Goldenberg, FMS "affects each person differently" (x). As a result of this inconsistency FMS has not been accepted by every medical practitioner, with some doctors dismissing it as exaggerated everyday aches and pains, while others feel that it is over-diagnosed causing patients to be mistreated (21). Winnie Yu and Michael McNett clearly point out that FMS is not a disease which "is a medical condition with a specific cause or causes and distinct resulting signs and symptoms. Fibromyalgia is a syndrome, a collections of signs, symptoms and medical problems that tend to occur together but do not appear to be related to a specific, identifiable cause." (4) They also point out that FMS is not arthritis, nor is it psychosomatic. And "fortunately, fibromyalgia is not life threatening. As painful as it might seem on some days, no one dies from having FMS" (4)

Certain risk factors have been noted as possibly increasing ones chances of having FMS. Women are 70 - 90 percent of all patients, onset more often occurs between the age of 20 and 55 (although it has been found in children (Yu, 68), and genetics are thought to be a factor - there is often more than one person with FMS in a family. In addition, lifestyle factors such as major stress, emotional trauma, and physical injury are often noted as existing in a patient's background. (Goldenberg, Wallace, Yu) However, Yu does indicate that the existence of stress does not seem to be a primary cause of FMS (Yu, 4).

Because of its complexity FMS is difficult to diagnose as there is no absolutely definitive test such as a blood test or x-ray. FMS is often diagnosed using a number of tools. Doctors often look first to do many tests in order to rule out other diseases with similar symptoms. Testing specific tender points on the body is a generally reliable and recommended procedure. Goldenberg notes: "tenderness at characteristic musculoskeletal locations establishes fibromyalgia as a consistent entity. The nine 'tender points' ... are important in diagnosis: each is bilateral, for a total of 18 test sites widely distributed on the body surface, and

tenderness on digital palpation of at least 11 in a patient with at least a three-month history of diffuse musculoskeletal pain is recommended as the diagnostic standard for fibromyalgia." (5) It must be emphasized that these tender points, when touched firmly are very painful, not just tender as the term might suggest. (Elrod, 45) The complexity is exacerbated by the reality that many doctors do not recognize FMS as an illness often telling patients it is all in their head, thus do not proceed through a thorough testing regime. However it is recognized by official medical organizations (Wallace, 9) and it is acknowledged by medical insurance providers who accept it for disability insurance.

Symptoms of condition

As noted above, FMS has a smorgasbord of symptoms and just like one does while going along the buffet tables picking only some items, a patient may not have all symptoms. Symptoms may include:

- **Pain** - pain that is associated with FMS may be a throbbing pain, an 'ache all over' type of pain, a deep ache in the muscles. Stiffness in the morning and headaches are also prevalent.
- **Fatigue** - extreme fatigue and tiredness, often feeling like an overwhelming weariness that causes one to want to stay in bed preventing even basic exercises. Chronic exhaustion is also a symptom.
- **Sleep disturbance** - sleep disturbance is one of the most prevalent and disabling of the symptoms. People with FMS often do not experience the stages of sleep that are essential for the repair of body tissue - the restorative stages. Patients wake not feeling refreshed. Along with lack of restful sleep patients often experience restless leg syndrome.
- **Emotional disturbance** - depression is a common symptom. Most often a patient will feel depressed because the chronic pain, fatigue, and lack of energy that is causing havoc in their life. Serious hopelessness and

depression are more concerning - "it is the most serious complication of fibromyalgia because it can create suicidal thoughts" (Yu, 120). Anxiety and panic attacks are also prevalent.

- **Brain fog** - sometimes called fibro fog. "With fibro fog, you have difficulty remembering familiar facts, focusing, and concentrating" (Yu, 117).
- **Other body issues** - these may include; irritable bowel syndrome, painful menstrual periods, dry mouth.

Lifestyle assessment/contributing factors

When discussing lifestyle and contributing factors one might be tempted to wonder that age old question - what comes first, the chicken or the egg? Dr. Joe Elrod lists some of the contributing factors and then points out that "you will probably recognize some causes are also listed as fibromyalgia symptoms earlier in this chapter" (26). In fact, Elrod is clear in his assessment that there is a "'vicious cycle' of events and factors that can contribute to the onset and progression of fibromyalgia" (27). An injury such as a motor vehicle accident that causes an "injury to the central nervous system" is often the trigger for FMS (Trock, 7). Or a sudden illness or emotional trauma such as divorce can be a contributing factor. Although, as noted above, stress is not a primary cause, chronic stress can be a factor. Dr. David Trock notes that "it's fair to say that chronic stress is unhealthy, has a deleterious effect on the immune system, contributes to insomnia, and can trigger fibromyalgia." (24) Lack of exercise may also be a contributing factor - evidence shows that the proper exercise regime will greatly lessen the symptoms and aid recovery. (Bonner) Personality type must also be taken into consideration. Dr. Jacob Teitelbaum states that he finds "that most people with CFS/FMS are mega-type-A overachievers" (252). Here is where the chicken or egg question comes in. Overwhelming stress can be caused by anxiety or depression, which may be caused by loss of sleep or illness, which has been exacerbated by poor diet. And

all this causes more loss of sleep and ultimately a lot of pain, which in turn prevents the patient from exercising, and this is the vicious cycle. Being a perfectionist can cause the patient to push on when rest is needed, but then rest and restorative sleep is evasive. Emotional factors such as lack of good support network (boner) can also be contributing factors. The key to understanding lifestyle and contributing factors for FMS is to understand that one must never considered a single in isolation and that every factor contributes in some way. This is why the holistic integrated approach that is outlined in the Yogic section is so important.

Medical Treatments

Because there are so many contributing factors and symptoms doctors have found it difficult to medicate using the standard pharmaceuticals. Doctors have prescribed tryptophan to help patients sleep, anti-depressants, and pain medications both by prescription and over the counter. Unfortunately patients have found that medications aimed at improving sleep or reducing pain often cause side effects that affect other symptoms. As Joe Elrod notes: "Traditional treatments for fibromyalgia should not be disregarded and may be helpful, but on their own, they usually do not offer sufferers the complete and permanent relief they are looking for. The reason traditional-gearred treatments rarely work by themselves is because they are geared primarily toward partial relief of symptoms, and since they do not treat possible causes, they cannot cure fibromyalgia" (55). In other words, medical treatments primarily mask the symptoms but do not remove the condition, which would allow the patient to move on with her life.

Yogic View

Yoga, an approximately five thousand year old science can bring equilibrium and homeostasis to the body, mind and spirit. Timothy McCall, in *Yoga As Medicine: the Yogic Prescription for Health and Healing* states that, "Yoga can change your life" (3). He also states: "As someone who has been an MD for over twenty years, I

can tell you that yoga is quite simply the most powerful system of overall health and well-being I have ever seen. ...This single comprehensive system can reduce stress, increase flexibility, improve balance, promote strength, heighten cardiovascular conditioning, lower blood pressure, reduce overweight, strengthen bones, prevent injuries, lift mood, improve immune function, increase the oxygen supply to the tissues, heighten sexual functioning and fulfillment, foster psychological equanimity, and promote spiritual well-being...and that's only a partial list" (3). Along with all the benefits that McCall has mentioned he also says that, "Yoga, when practiced appropriately, can help people with fibromyalgia in several ways, beginning with the stress response" (301)

It is believed that people with fibromyalgia have an over-active sympathetic nervous system (stress-response or fight-or-flight response), and an under-active parasympathetic nervous system (relaxation response). In other words there is a glitch in the body's autonomic system; it is hyper-vigilant, which leads to chronic exhaustion.

Further, McCall says that, "A number of yoga practices can ratchet down this stress response and switch the body into the relaxation response, mediated by the parasympathetic nervous system. Learning to modulate your stress response can not only diminish your symptoms, but help you deal with the stress of having a disorder that is poorly understood by both the medical community and the public. The slow, deep breathing common in yoga practice, which becomes the way long-term practitioners breathe most of the time, is an especially effective way to calm an agitated nervous system" (301).

There are other aspects of FMS that manifest in addition to those that are identified by the medical view. These will be discussed as the Koshas and healing program are explained.

Aspects of Condition Relative to the 5 Koshas

Swami Jnaneshvara Bharati states that, "We humans are like a lamp that has five lampshades over our light. Each of the lampshades is a different color and density. As the light shines through the lampshades, it is progressively changed in color and nature. It is a bitter-sweet coloring. On the one hand, the shades provide the individualized beauty of each lamp. Yet, the lampshades also obscure the pure light." (Bharati)

The yogic path is a path of self-realization where one has the ability to move progressively from the outer to the inner through the koshas or sheaths, eventually allowing our pure light to shine forth. The koshas, sheaths, or coverings are thought of as only appearance, or maya. They are an illusion of our true nature, but our true nature, our eternal consciousness, lies beneath the sheaths and once we remove those sheaths we can then live our true nature, our true self, Atman. Yoga facilitates integration of all the koshas, bringing us back to health and wholeness, and through purification and evolution, back to our true self, our pure spirit.

i. Physical: structural alignment and doshic assessment of prakriti and vikriti/ contributing factors affecting condition

The physical sheath is the Annamaya kosha. It is the food-formed sheath of the gross body and also includes what we take in through our senses. It is made up of the five elements, earth, water, fire, air and ether. Asana and proper diet purify this sheath. Starting with the physical, outer sheath, or gross body (*sthūila sharīra*), brings awareness, enabling the yoga practitioner to connect with their body, be more aware of how it is affected by different situations, stressors and triggers, which then allows them to be better able to manage their symptoms of Fibromyalgia. In yoga the *uttistha sthiti*, or standing asana, introduce the practitioner to the physical or outer sheath of the body and break the tamasic, lazy

nature of the body. They are the foundation of all the other asana; they heat the body and work on structural defects, while increasing flexibility, stability and stamina. When the body is steady and at ease, the breath starts to come under control and then the mind may have moments of peace and clarity. Yoga helps us return to our true nature through the interconnected eight limbs of yoga.

With respect to the physical, Fibromyalgia Syndrome (FMS) which is perceived as a Vata imbalance can create heightened sensitivity and destabilization of the central nervous system (CNS - brain and spinal cord). FMS affects the Annamaya kosha by over-stimulating the endocrine system (the hypothalamus gland in the brain controls the pituitary glands, which in turn control the release of hormones from the other endocrine system glands, so it is the hypothalamus that connects the CNS and the endocrine system), which puts the body on high alert and ready for action; the fight-or-flight response is activated. Stress is a big contributor to this problem. It causes mental tension, pain and fatigue, an increase in heart and breathing rate, but also a decrease in digestion and elimination. When the fight-or-flight response is triggered the hypothalamus is stimulated, in turn calling into action the pituitary and adrenal glands, epinephrine and cortisol are released and the body is ready to take action, ready for the perceived threat. When the body is constantly ever vigilant, the immune system is suppressed and the body is then more susceptible to deterioration of health. All of these physical factors can trigger FMS.

**ii. Energy: prana and chakra assessment/contributing factors
affecting condition**

The energy or vital sheath is the Pranamaya kosha and is also part of the gross or physical body, as well as the subtle or astral body. Prana is defined as energy. This is the vital energy or life force sheath and it relates to the breath

and the five Prana Vayus - Udana, Prana, Samana, Apana, and Vyana. This sheath is purified through Pranayama, which is rhythmic control of the breath.

With FMS the energy is blocked, there is not enough prana, giving way to fatigue in all the systems of the body. Pranayama will help alleviate the abnormal breathing which is associated with FMS. The chakras affected are the solar plexus or Manipura chakra, and the root chakra or Muladhara chakra. Manipura relates to the life force and energy, which is severely lacking in the case of FMS, and Muladhara relates to the adrenal glands which are affected by FMS. When we focus on the breath we start on the path of pratyahara, control of the senses, which is needed before we can truly move on to dharana, which is sometimes defined as concentration, but the word dharana actually means immovable concentration of the mind.

iii. Psycho-Emotional: mental-emotional assessment/contributing factors affecting condition

The mental sheath is the Manamaya kosha, a sheath of discriminatory process, and is part of the subtle body (*sukshma sharira*). Maya means mind and this is where thoughts and emotions are processed. Swami Jnaneshvara Bharati says that, "It is like a supervisor in a factory, in that it gives instructions, but is not supposed to be the manager of the factory of life. Because of this, it naturally has doubts, and created illusions. When it receives clear instructions from the deeper level, it functions quite well. However, when it is clouded over by its illusions, the deeper wisdom is clouded over." (Bharati) The first 4 limbs of yoga (yama, niyama, asana and pranayama) which are the more external practices of yoga, all condition the body and the mind for the more inner, subtle practices of dharana (concentration), dhyana (meditation), and Samadhi (enlightenment).

With FMS there is emotional instability making life's emotional issues difficult to deal with. Accompanying the Type-A personality, there is perfectionism and the feeling of needing to be "responsible for everyone and everything" (International Journal of Yoga Therapy) having to do it all, as well as worries about the future and the past. In explaining Sutra I.2 *yoga cittavrtti nirodhah*, B.K.S. Iyengar, in *Light on the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, says that, "Yoga is defined as restraint of fluctuations in the consciousness. It is the art of studying the behaviour of consciousness, which has three functions; cognition, conation or volition, and motion. Yoga shows ways of understanding the functionings of the mind, and helps to quieten their movements, leading one towards the undisturbed state of silence which dwells in the very seat of consciousness. Yoga is thus the art and science of mental discipline through which the mind becomes cultured and matured". (46)

Once the fluctuations of the mind have been calmed by asana (postures), pranayama (breath work), pratyahara (withdrawal of the senses) and dharana (concentration), the mind can further be stilled by dhyana (meditation), moving beyond the mind, which will all aid in the calming of the emotional instability.

iv. Wisdom: higher-self-identity assessment/contributing factors affecting condition

The wisdom or intellectual sheath is the Vijnanamaya kosha, and is part of the subtle as well as the casual or super-subtle body), which contains all past karmas. Vijnana is defined as knowing, but not knowing in the normal sense of having knowledge, knowing in the sense of wisdom to know our true self. This is the witness kosha, the ego consciousness that can be clouded by manas, or mental activity, hence losing its positive strength to seek the truth. (Claffey, YT Training Manual)

With FMS there is an inability to be the witness; insight and intuition are blocked (International Journal of yoga Therapy), but as progress is made through the 8 limbs of yoga, moving from the more external to the more internal, the mind begins to experience moments, although brief in the beginning, of clarity, peace and knowing, and of letting go of ego.

v. Bliss: spiritual issues assessment/contributing factors affecting condition

The bliss or illumined sheath is the *Anandamaya kosha*; it is the most inner of the koshas surrounding the eternal centre of consciousness; this is the casual body (*karana sharira*) where there is inner union and bliss, which goes beyond the mind and is independent of stimulus or reason, it simply is.

With FMS there is a lack of trust in something larger than oneself, something beyond (Internal Journal of Yoga Therapy), yet in the silence of deep meditation there can be a transformation of the egoic consciousness, a letting go of the covering of the pure light of consciousness, where there is an all-transcendent blissful consciousness.

It is imperative that one looks at all five koshas and the three bodies when there is deterioration of health, as they are all connected and one can affect the others. For example, as Dr. Rita Khanna states, "Pranamaya Kosha maintains cellular life and also provides for cell-to-cell organization and cooperation, which is essential to the integrity of Annamaya Kosha. Imbalances, in Prana, disrupt cellular function and lead to diseased states of the physical body. It means that disease first affected the Pranamaya Kosha, and from there, extended to the Annamaya Kosha." (Khanna)

b. Healing Program: yogic therapies to gradually bring balance and healing

According to Georg Feuerstein, Ph.D. in his preface to Judith Lasater's book *Living Your Yoga: Finding the Spiritual in Everyday Life*, the complex tradition of yoga is about a very simple thing: happiness (ananda). Yoga tells us that in order to realize lasting happiness, we must discover our true, spiritual nature. And although our true nature, or spiritual Self, is always the same, it tends to be obscured by our thoughts, emotions, and patterns of behaviour, as the brightly shining sun, which is ever radiant, is periodically hidden from our view by drifting dark clouds. Yoga helps us to remove all obstructing (mental) clouds, so that we may come to enjoy the sunshine within, and live in the light of our true nature, in peace, harmony and happiness. (Lasater, p.xv-xvi)

In ayurveda there are three doshas or body-types: a) Vata which is governed by air and space/ether - its main function is the carrier of energy, b) Pitta which is governed by fire and water - its main function is to provoke transformation, c) Kapha which is governed by earth and water - its main function is strength and resistance, providing stability. Vata is usually the first of the doshas to become unbalanced, as in the situation with FMS, which is a vata imbalance. With vata imbalance, as with FMS there is fear, anxiety, and stress.

There are also three gunas or qualities in ayurveda, and of these three gunas, sattva (balance or harmony) is the ideal, although we need a balance of all including rajas (aggression), and tamas (inertia) to be able to function in daily life. If only the qualities of sattva are possessed there would be no grounding, as sattva is governed by air and space, as is vata. When FMS is present there can be an increase in rajas leading to anger and obsession, and/or an increase in tamas leading to stagnation and depression. Hence the goal of yoga therapy is to reach a sattvic state of peace and tranquility, but to also have a healthy balance of rajas and tamas. To achieve this state it is necessary to purify the body, mind and senses so

that the true self can shine through and happiness can be realized from within, not from the external.

i. Asana for Fibromyalgia

Asana for FMS must be approached with caution so as not to aggravate the symptoms, especially if they are already quite severe. But it must also be approached with regularity, starting with restorative poses and moving on slowly from there once it is determined that the poses are not causing a flare-up of symptoms. Doing Ujjayi pranayama while in a restorative pose such as supported Matsyasana (fish pose), on a low to mid-height rolled blanket, to gently open the heart and chest area would be a good start. All other supported restorative yoga poses done gently and with caution can be beneficial and help to move the FMS sufferer from a sedentary lifestyle to a more active and energizing one. Those poses include Supta Baddha Konasana (reclining bound angle pose), Setu Bandha Sarvangasana (bridge pose), Supta Virasana (reclining hero pose), Viparita Karani (legs-up-the-wall pose), Balasana (child's pose), and Savasana (corpse pose).

Once it has been established that no major flare-up of symptoms has occurred, then it is safe to move on to some more active poses such as Supta Padangusthasana (reclining big toe pose) and poses such as Timothy McCall recommends on pages 303-312 of his book, *Yoga as Medicine: the Yogic Prescription for Health and Healing*. The poses include gentle hand and elbow movements while in Savasana II (something he refers to as "wobble and waggle") which gently stretches the hamstrings and fascia in the backs of the legs as well as stretching the sides of the body, the "Windmill" gently twisting the torso, and then a very shortened and modified Sun Salutation. McCall also states that Roger Cole "recommends in particular supported forward bends such as Paschimottasana with the forehead supported by a folded blanket or your arm placed on a chair (as long as you don't have lower back problems and supine twists such as Jathara

Parivartanasana with bent knees, which can be supported by folded blankets" (312). McCall also says that, "Roger Cole has heard from several students with FMS that Iyengar restorative poses 'are what saved them.' He thinks it makes perfect sense that restorative poses would be helpful, because they stretch muscles passively, while providing much needed deep relaxation" (312).

To help balance vata, Karen Claffey in section 6, page 29, of the Yoga Therapist Training Manual states that, one should "Notice parts of the body that feels grounded, explore body for fear and security. Notice areas that are cool and those that are warm. Notice the extent to which you can remain in the body," and also that one should do "Asanas placing pressure on pelvis such as boat and seated postures; balancing poses for concentration; asana with slow, steady breath; asanas with strong earth or water contend such as Hero, whose qualities are missing in the Vata constitution, daily practice (regularity), restorative poses." Karen also recommends therapy requirements as follows: "Safe touch, so that everything becomes calm; muscle Energy (hugging to the bones, midline, core) applied gently; and The Perspective of Allowing: talk about nature, trees, wind, leaves allowing wind to move them, leaves not resisting the wind. Establish stability and connection whether in standing or sitting or in Uttanasana: 1. Open to grace - Inner Body Bright, outer body soft and draping over IB, 2. Hug midline, 3. Thighs back and scoop tailbone". The yoga poses and manual adjustments that Karen suggests are: "Tadasana - cradle neck & forehead, Uttanasana - draw skin/fascia toward midline", (Claffey, training manual, p 37-8), "or child's pose" (Claffey, lecture), "Triangle pose - align neck and press, align arm back in socket, then say look up. Restorative Posture: Supported Fish - roll a blanket (low to mid-height) and place under heart and do Ujjayi breathing. They must learn to relax. You can also make a roll for their cervical spine - more calming", (Claffey, training manual), "blanket over thighs for grounding", (Claffey, lecture).

Mukunda Stiles, in *Ayurvedic Yoga Therapy*, suggests relaxation and Yoga Nidra (yogic sleep), as well as slow silent rhythmic motion moving with the breath, such as the joint-freeing series and the palm tree vinyasa.

Shoosh Lettick Crotzer, in *Yoga for Fibromyalgia: Move, Breathe, and Relax to Improve Your Quality of Life*, recommends poses such as: Seated (on a chair) Tadasana (mountain pose) with Sama (equal) Vritti (move) breathing awareness, in which the inhalation and exhalation are equal, but the breath is deep abdominal breathing. She suggests doing the breath work in Savasana (corpse pose) if necessary. Moving on she recommends Tadasana, Urdhva Hastasana (upward hand pose), a variety of neck stretches while seated on a chair, seated Garudasana (eagle) arms, Namaste (prayer pose), Viparita Namaste (reverse prayer pose), Bhujangasana (cobra pose) or Sphinx pose, seated in chair Bhujangasana, Bidhalasana (cat pose), Adho Mukha Svanasana (downward-facing dog pose), Ardha Adho Mukha Svanasana (half dog pose) at the wall or with a chair, Supta Padangusthasana (reclining hamstring stretch pose), seated Padangusthasana on a chair, Jathara Parivartanasana (reclining twist pose) with one leg straight and one leg bent, Bharadvajasana (seated twist pose) on a chair, reclining and seated on a chair Thread-the-Needle pose (hip stretch), a modified Natarajasana (dancer pose) using a strap and chair, Side-Lying Natarajasana, Viparita Karani (legs-up-the-wall pose), Savasana or modified Savasana side-lying or with legs on a chair. She also has some other sequences in the book, which include general pain relief, upper body pain relief, lower body pain relief, Visualization for pain relief (healing breath), reducing fatigue and improving sleep, seated beginner sequence, beginner maintenance sequence and full maintenance sequence.

It is important to remember that with FMS there can be a heightened sensitivity to many factors including pain but, as Neil Pearson stated in his *Anatomy and Physiology for Yoga Therapists* presentation during the Heaven On Earth Yoga Institute Yoga Therapist Training in July of 2011, one must begin to move slowly

and gradually into the pain so the hyper-sensitive nervous system can realize that it's not a dangerous situation and in this way one can reset the body so that the alarms don't go off when there is not a real threat or danger.

Yoga asanas help to stretch, strengthen, relieve tension, and decrease pain in the muscles, as well as improve circulation, endurance and stamina, thus making it easier for the FMS sufferer to continue an active lifestyle, with less pain and fatigue. Other benefits which are especially beneficial are improved mood, sleep and concentration.

ii. Pranayama for Fibromyalgia

Due to the over-active sympathetic nervous system with FMS, the breathing rate tends to be increased and breath is shallow and irregular. The body is on high-alert and ready to jump into action at the slightest perceived threat. There can also be shortness of breath and reduced endurance with activity. Therefore it is important to introduce slow rhythmic, focused breathing, such as diaphragmatic breathing focusing on the exhalation, which is the relaxation breath. Other useful breathing techniques or pranayama include Ujjayi (victorious, ocean breath) and gentle Viloma (interrupted) breath, Bhramari (bumble bee) breath (which is vata balancing), as is Nadi Sodhana (alternate nostril) breathing with focus and rhythm. Gentle left nostril Kapalabhati breath is calming for vata as it creates warmth without causing excess movement (right nostril Kapalabhati is energizing).

Pranayama helps to increase the flow of oxygen and nutrients in the body, and helps to calm the nervous system, reducing stress, and also depression (which very often can accompany fibromyalgia). The breath can purify and control the vital energy of the body, helping to master the rajasic guna, and through it we can gain control of our emotions.

iii. Meditation for Fibromyalgia

If the mind is tamasic the FMS sufferer will feel dull and sleepy and unable to concentrate, and if the mind is rajasic thoughts will not be stopped and the mind races, therefore tamas and rajas are not conducive to meditation. Once the mind has been brought to a more sattvic state through asana and pranayama then it will have a greater capacity to sustain attention without distraction.

Timothy McCall suggests that, "Meditation can play a vital role in helping manage the pain of FMS. Practitioners learn in meditation to tune directly in to their experience and separate painful sensations, which may be bad enough, from their ideas and feeling about the pain, which can be worse, fuelling the fire of suffering. By cultivating the ability to selectively focus your awareness, meditation may also help you modulate the pain sensations down to a more manageable level" (McCall, 302).

Various forms of meditation are beneficial for balancing vata especially when done with regularity on a daily basis. Some of those as mentioned in Karen Claffey's section 6, on page 30 of the Yoga Therapist Training Manual are: concentration focusing on a candle, grounding affirmations of safety and security, repetition of a mantra to calm the mind, yantra or imagery to increase focus, and meditation with a specific beginning, middle and end.

David Frawley, in *Yoga & Ayurveda: Self-Healing and Self-Realization* states that, "Vata types should practice meditation in order to calm their restless minds and nerves and to relieve their inherent tendency to fear and anxiety. Meditation can take them very far in overcoming their main problem in life - a hypersensitive and hyperactive mind and vital force. Meditation helps them sleep, alleviates their nervous digestion, and strengthens their immune system, which are their main areas of weakness" (300).

Meditation or dhayana can be difficult to master, but the seeds of a meditation practice are planted with the asana practice and pranayama practices, where one is focusing on being in the pose, on balance and on the breath. This can help the FMS sufferer focus and let go of their worries. It can be very grounding and therefore helpful for taming the out of balance vata kosha.

Meditation can purify and control the mental body, helping to master the sattvic guna and gain control of the mind and direct to towards knowing, the knowledge of higher self.

iv. Diet for Fibromyalgia

Both yoga and ayurveda advocate a pure vegetarian/sattvic diet; the basis of this diet being ahimsa or non-harming/non-violence. This is a diet where there is no killing or harming of animals; a diet including plenty of fresh natural spring water (room temperature or warm). Further, it is a diet of organic fresh fruits, vegetables and grains, grown in good, healthy soil, ripened naturally, and prepared correctly, with a loving, peaceful attitude, eaten at regular times and in moderation, and not stored for longer than twenty-four hours. There is great benefit in preparing the meals with enjoyment, listening to music or the sounds of nature, or while chanting, such as the bija mantra Ram which is the seed sound for the Manipura or 3rd chakra, where the digestive fire or Agni resides. Lunch, which should consist of fresh vegetables and grains, legumes, and light amounts of cheese or dairy for protein, must be the main meal as this is the time when Agni is at its peak. This diet brings harmony, balance, purity, clarity and peace.

Since it has been shown that when FMS is present in the body there is an overabundance of vata dosha, it follows that a vata balancing diet would be appropriate for someone with FMS. With respect to gunas and FMS, there will most likely be an increase in rajas and tamas, so a more sattvic, vital energy or

prana enhancing diet is called for. Since a balance is necessary the diet may include some non-harming rajasic foods (from happy animals) as needed, but all tamasic/stagnating foods should be avoided, as should foods which tend to be allergens.

As Karen Claffey states in her '*Eating According to Your Dosha*' notes, in the Yoga Therapist Training Manual, foods for calming vata, and foods to be avoided are as follows:

Foods for calming Vata:

- Cooked, warm, soupy, light foods
- Plenty of healthy oils (sesame oil, ghee, butter, nut* butters, and essential fatty acids)
- Natural and healthy sweet, sour, and salty tastes and flavourful sauces.
- Carminative spices such as basil, oregano, ginger, cardamom, cinnamon, cumin, pippali, coriander, dill
- Protein-rich diet of animal products which do not take the animal's life: ghee*, warm milk*, yogurt*, cooked cheese*, buttermilk*, kefir*, eggs*, quinoa, corn*, basmati rice, easily digested nuts* and sesame seeds
- Fruits and juices: tomato*, pomegranate, carrot, fresh-squeezed orange* and grapefruit*, apricot, peach, strawberry, raspberry, and vegetable juices
- Lots of fresh veggies: pumpkin, carrots, beets, leafy greens, avocado, broccoli, baked potato, winter squash, tomatoes*

* However some foods may be pain triggers for FMS.

Eliminating these foods from the diet and then slowly adding them back one at the time will aid in determining if they are pain triggers. Eggs are considered less tamasic than meat

and fish, as there is no death of an animal involved, however they are considered to be karmically impure, and although they do decrease vata they do tend to be an allergen and can also be a trigger for FMS pain. Other foods that are vata calming, but that can also be FMS pain triggers include: dairy products, soy beans, citrus fruits, nuts (particularly peanuts, brazil, hazel and almonds) , tomatoes, and corn.

Foods to be avoided:

- Caffeine
- White sugar
- Soda pop
- Excessive use of beans (except tofu) and heavy grains (prepare them with ghee and spices)
- Dry foods taken alone
- Taking foods and drinks colder than room temperature
- Red meat
- Hydrogenated, saturated, and polyunsaturated oils

Other foods to be avoided are pre-packaged foods, foods with artificial preservatives, and foods that it is necessary to add spices to, to suit your taste buds; these foods are tamasic and have no vital life force or prana in them. This diet should include as little dairy and wheat as possible, as they tend to be allergens. Foods which increase or aggravate vata, such as gassy foods like broccoli, large beans (kidney, lima), undercooked cabbage, should be used infrequently and should be steamed or cooked with digestive spices such as ginger, which can eliminate the gaseous properties, making them easier to digest.

v. Lifestyle for Fibromyalgia

As with any illness it is important when one is suffering from FMS to make changes to one's lifestyle so as to not aggravate the syndrome, and to also effect positive changes to lessen or alleviate the symptoms.

Some of the things that can help are:

- a healthy sattvic diet and anti-ama (toxic, non-nurturing) diet
- a regular schedule of appropriate amount of sleep
- a regular yoga, pranayama, and meditation practices
- an active social life with friends and family
- a strong support system
- a spiritual practice - whatever that may mean for each individual
- a positive attitude
- yogic purification practices and other alternative health therapies
- taking some "me" time
- prioritizing activities and not over-doing
- keeping a record of daily activity, food, feelings, etc. to notice triggers

Regular daily routines are extremely important when working towards balancing vata and therefore health. The natural rhythms of the body must be adhered to, maintaining a regular schedule for eating, sleeping, and exercising. If there are constant fluctuations in these schedules the natural ability of the body to maintain balance is compromised. A stable nervous system must be maintained to enhance recovery and one of the most important elements for maintaining a stable nervous system as well as balancing vata, is adhering to the body's natural rhythms. Stiles states that, "The practice of Yoga needs support from a lifestyle that is conducive to sustaining the subtle and sometimes not so subtle changes that good practice naturally creates. ... This aspect of lifestyles is the most important. Regularity promotes a natural capacity to balance Vata's underlying energy of prana

thus stabilizing the mind and physiological rhythms". (48) Stiles also talks about the importance of adhering to the yogic ethical guidelines, the Yamas (social disciplines) and the Niyamas (personal disciplines). (51-53)

Conclusion

Timothy McCall convincingly points out that "Yoga has a decidedly different view from Western medicine's about what constitutes health—and this may be a big part of why it's so effective. The absence of symptoms is in no way equated with health in yoga. Health to the yogi extends far beyond not having a head ache or knee pain—or even being cured of cancer. It is about optimizing the function of every system in your body from muscles to digestion, circulation, and immunity. It is about emotional well-being, spiritual resilience, and buoyancy, even joy. Yoga teaches that only when these elements are aligned can you maximize your chance for health and healing". (3, 4) Modern medicine seems only able to partially treat and mask some of the symptoms, but not to actually get to the root causes of the problem/s. "Yoga envisions a web of causation that is much more complex than the limited number of factors most doctors consider". (McCall, 4) McCall also says that yoga looks at stress, emotional temperament, the role the mind plays, connections to people, and whether there's a feeling of life purpose. (4) Yoga takes into account that everything is connected and therefore works on many areas concurrently. "The crucial difference between yoga as medicine and conventional medicine is yoga's holistic emphasis on strengthening you throughout your body and mind. ... But rather than being in competition with conventional medical care, yoga can complement it." (McCall, 4)

When looking at what the medical field can do for the Fibromyalgia sufferer compared to what the yogic system can do, there really is no comparison. The benefits of the yogic system far outweigh, and in fact are literally thousands of years ahead of what the medical field is doing.

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