

Falling off the Ladder: Learning to Manage Chronic Illness with Yoga Therapy

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The fact of my life is that I routinely feel terrible. I could use words like, “awful”, “no energy”, “lots of pain”, “nauseated”, “every joint hurts from my fingers to hips to knees”, “I’m wearing my shoulders as earrings from tension”, “cold sores”, “shingles outbreaks”, “fibro-fog”, and maybe a bit more, but it really all boils down to: I feel terrible. Unfortunately, this is usually how I feel when I sit down to write in my journal. It’s another fact of my life. When I feel better than this, I’m out trying to get courageous things accomplished. Living in the moment is completely and utterly dependent upon my daily energy and pain levels. Pain is getting better – well not really – I’m just getting better at managing pain. I’m also probably at most to fault for over doing things in my life because I have this inane ability to not be able to say one simple word, “No”. When I do get to overload level and am forced by my body to use the word “No”, I’m doing so at the expense of other people’s expectations of what they want me to do. “No Len, I’m not going to church today”. “No Kyle, I’m not coming into the store today”. When what I really want to do is call Judy and Donna and say, “No, I’m not curling tonight”. Alas (I wish there were a better word for that...), I’ve made a commitment and because I wasn’t there last week, phoning and saying, “I feel like shit” just won’t cut it today. Even though... I’m on the verge of throwing up, my knee is swollen from falling, my hands hurt from sweeping so hard last night & over the weekend at the bonspiel; I can’t find the icepack for my knees, and darn, I just gagged and almost puked. Great. And I have to curl tonight?

When will I learn? How can I learn to just slow it down a bit and still do the things I love and be a social being? My body will say no for me. Teaching yoga is pushing it a bit – simply because of the added time with having to now be in the store. Kyle wants me in the store on Tuesday & Wednesday, but Tuesday is just so hard for me, it’ll have to be Wednesday and Thursday. Last week it was Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday – and they were long long days. On Friday I started the day leaving the house at 7.15am, taught yoga from 8-9.30, went to the curling rink to check on my team, hurried home for a quick shower, went back to the rink for a photo, then went to the store for the rest of the day, leaving at 5.15 to go teach another yoga class that went until 8.00 & then back to the rink to watch my team fight off the Noble rink in an almost 8 ender. Sad... I stayed late on Wednesday to teach & practice yoga & the same thing on Thursday. Saturday morning I was back at the rink for an early curling game that we won, headed home for a rest then back to the rink for an afternoon game that we lost, and then stayed for the dinner and party getting home well after 8.30 so bone tired I could hardly move. I guess it was no wonder I didn’t go to church on Sunday, but even on Sunday, Kyle brought Rylee up for us to watch & even if I’d wanted to go to church, I wouldn’t have been able to because I was watching Rylee. Yesterday, I stayed home and did about ten loads of laundry (that still need folded), vacuumed, was blindsided by a phone call from my mother, and then curled in Qualicum with only three of us, so I had to throw three stones and sweep by myself all the rocks except the ones I threw. Today – well, you’ve already read about today and I still have to curl tonight again. I

need to be cleaning in the office. Now that Lauren and Rylee have gone, I don't have to worry about being quiet. Ok, this is a perfect time – but there's that throbbing knee pain again, and my hands keep dropping things.... And, so it goes. KMB

Introduction

And so it goes... the above journal entry is a perfect opening to this work on Chronic Illnesses, in particular Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS) and Fibromyalgia (FMS), and practical applications of yoga therapy for these conditions. This journal entry is typical of the negative pattern conditioning I followed for years that finally toppled me and forced me to readjust my worldview. I've chosen to write this work as a personal story, from a personal perspective, and also from one of a therapist as it is my experiences of living with chronic illness that have led me to the path of becoming a therapist. This work explores a working definition of chronic pain, CFS/FMS, according to Western Medicine, followed by typical procedures to address the illness. Come with me on a journey of twists and turns after falling off the steep academic career ladder from chronic illness and through my subsequent healing with yoga therapies that enhance and guide me to manage my conditions. We explore the eight limbs of yoga and how each applies to CFS/FMS, as well as the chakra system and Ayurvedic and Macrobiotics for diet.

Chronic Illness [Description of Condition]

Let's talk about chronic illness. I have direct experience living with a chronic illness, so this piece of work comes more from a personal, "I've lived this" perspective than simply a research standpoint. When I was forty, I collapsed under a stressful work situation. For over 18 months, I saw my physical life crumble before my eyes. I would sit in meetings and colleagues would notice my fingers turning blue. Students watched as my left leg would tremble throughout an entire class or I would drop chalk when trying to write on the board. They'd correct me when I couldn't get a word out of my mouth and were not very kind on evaluations on questions about my organization; which is always impeccable. My forgetful words, trembling body, continual headaches, and rubbing my chest to try to rid myself of the constant pain was obvious to most of my students and colleagues. My doctor advised me to take medical leave; one of his colleagues told me to take up a less stressful profession; I was seeking help to deal with the stress and was told I was handling things admirably. Hmmmm. That's a difference in opinion. My husband and close friends worried about me. Other colleagues told me to ignore what was happening to

my body and just keep working. One even went so far as to tell me that if I took medical leave I would be committing career suicide. My body finally said no to the stress. My immune system collapsed, my thyroid collapsed, I had a minor heart attack with no lasting damage to my heart because I'd kept working out feverishly throughout all of this. My doctor, my husband, my dean, and my ombudsmen finally decided it was time for me to take medical leave. After nearly a year of medical evaluations, extreme exhaustion, overall body pain, the inability to focus or concentrate on just about anything, I received a diagnosis of three major illnesses, which included hypothyroidism, Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, and Fibromyalgia. I am providing Wikipedia explanations for each of these illnesses, you may find some of the language problematic, but this will give you an overview of the medical conditions.

Hypothyroidism:

“Hypothyroidism is the disease state in humans and other animals caused by insufficient production of thyroid hormone by the thyroid gland. Cretinism is a form of hypothyroidism found in infants. Hypothyroidism can result from postpartum thyroiditis, a condition that affects about 5% of all women within a year after giving birth. The first phase is typically hyperthyroidism. Then, the thyroid either returns to normal or a woman develops hypothyroidism. Of those women who experience hypothyroidism associated with postpartum thyroiditis, one in five will develop permanent hypothyroidism requiring life-long treatment (Wikipedia, 2011).”

I'd originally received this diagnosis after my second son was born. I took medication for the illness until my mid-thirties and stopped taking it without permission of my doctor not realizing that this was a condition that required life-long treatment. It was not surprising that I'd burned out my thyroid over the ensuing years through over exercise and stressful situations. The second diagnosis I received was Chronic Fatigue Syndrome with an underlying diagnosis of Fibromyalgia.

Chronic Fatigue Syndrome:

“Chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS) is the most common name given to a poorly understood, variably debilitating disorder or disorders of uncertain causation. Symptoms of CFS include widespread muscle and joint pain, cognitive difficulties, chronic, often severe mental and physical exhaustion and other characteristic symptoms in a previously healthy and active person. Fatigue is a common symptom in many illnesses, but CFS is a multi-systemic disease and is relatively rare by comparison. Diagnosis requires a number of features, the most common being severe mental and physical exhaustion which is "unrelieved by rest," is worsened by exertion, and is present

for at least six months. All diagnostic criteria require that the symptoms must not be caused by other medical conditions. CFS patients may report additional symptoms, including muscle weakness, cognitive dysfunction, hypersensitivity, orthostatic intolerance, digestive disturbances, depression, poor immune response, and cardiac and respiratory problems. It is unclear if these symptoms represent co-morbid conditions or are produced by an underlying etiology of CFS. Full resolution occurs in only 5-10% of cases.

CFS is thought to have an incidence of 4 adults per 1,000 in the United States. For unknown reasons, CFS occurs more often in women than men, and people in their 40s and 50s. The illness is estimated to be less prevalent among children and adolescents, but studies are contradictory as to the degree. There is no medical test that is widely accepted to be diagnostic of CFS. It remains a diagnosis of exclusion based largely on patient history and symptomatic criteria, although a number of tests can aid diagnosis.

Whereas there is agreement on the genuine threat to health, happiness, and productivity posed by CFS, various physicians groups, researchers, and patient activists promote different nomenclature, diagnostic criteria, etiologic hypotheses, and treatments, resulting in controversy about many aspects of the disorder. The name CFS itself is controversial, as advocacy groups as well as some experts feel it trivializes the illness and have supported efforts to change it. (Wikipedia, 2011).”

Basically, what this description is telling you is that I’m tired. All the time. Nothing cures chronic fatigue. It is always with you. Pushing sugar or caffeine may help in the short run or to help you get through a tough hour, but then the drop in energy comes again. Nothing cures chronic fatigue. All you can hope for is a management of symptoms.

Fibromyalgia:

“Fibromyalgia, meaning muscle and connective tissue pain (also referred to as FM or FMS), is a disorder classified by the presence of chronic widespread pain and a heightened and painful response to gentle touch (tactile allodynia). Other core features of the disorder include debilitating fatigue; sleep disturbance, and joint stiffness. In addition, persons affected by the disorder frequently experience a range of other symptoms that involve multiple body systems, including difficulty with swallowing, functional bowel and bladder abnormalities, difficulty breathing, diffuse sensations of numbness and tingling (non-dermatomal paresthesia), abnormal motor activity (i.e. nocturnal myoclonus, sleep bruxism), and cognitive dysfunction. An increased prevalence of affective and anxiety-related symptoms is also well known. While the criteria for such an entity have not yet been thoroughly developed, the recognition that fibromyalgia involves more than just pain has led to the frequent use of the term "fibromyalgia syndrome". Not all affected persons experience all the symptoms associated with the greater syndrome. Fibromyalgia is considered a controversial diagnosis, with some authors contending that the disorder is a ‘non-disease’, due in part to a lack of objective laboratory tests or medical imaging studies to confirm the

diagnosis. While historically considered either a musculoskeletal disease or neuropsychiatric condition, evidence from research conducted in the last three decades has revealed abnormalities within the central nervous system affecting brain regions that may be linked both to clinical symptoms and research phenomena. Although there is as yet no generally accepted cure for Fibromyalgia, there are treatments that have been demonstrated by controlled clinical trials to be effective in reducing symptoms, including medications, patient education, exercise and behavioral interventions.

The defining symptoms of Fibromyalgia are chronic, widespread pain and allodynia. Other symptoms can include moderate to severe fatigue, needle-like tingling of the skin, muscle aches, prolonged muscle spasms, weakness in the limbs, nerve pain, functional bowel disturbances, and chronic sleep disturbances. Sleep disturbances may be related to a phenomenon called alpha-delta sleep, a condition in which deep sleep (associated with delta waves) is frequently interrupted by bursts of alpha waves, which normally occur during wakefulness. Slow-wave sleep is often dramatically reduced.

Many patients experience cognitive dysfunction (known as "brain fog" or "fibro fog"), which may be characterized by impaired concentration, problems with short and long-term memory, short-term memory consolidation, impaired speed of performance, inability to multi-task, cognitive overload, diminished attention span and anxiety and depressive symptoms. "Brain fog" may be directly related to the sleep disturbances experienced by sufferers of Fibromyalgia.

Other symptoms often attributed to fibromyalgia that may possibly be due to a comorbid disorder include myofascial pain syndrome also referred to as Chronic Myofascial Pain, diffuse non-dermatomal paresthesias, functional bowel disturbances and irritable bowel syndrome (possibly linked to lower levels of ghrelin, genitourinary symptoms and interstitial cystitis, dermatological disorders, headaches, myoclonic twitches, and symptomatic hypoglycemia. Although fibromyalgia is classified based on the presence of chronic widespread pain, pain may also be localized in areas such as the shoulders, neck, low back, hips, or other areas. Many sufferers also experience varying degrees of facial pain and have high rates of comorbid temporomandibular joint disorder. Eye problems such as eye pain, sensitivity to light, blurred vision, and fluctuating visual clarity, can also be a symptom of the condition. As a consequence of this, sufferers may have to change their lens prescription more often.

Symptoms can have a slow onset, and many patients have mild symptoms beginning in childhood, that are often misdiagnosed as growing pains. Symptoms are often aggravated by unrelated illness or changes in the weather. They can become more or less tolerable throughout daily or yearly cycles; however, many people with Fibromyalgia find that, at least some of the time, the condition prevents them from performing normal activities such as driving a car or walking up stairs. The disorder does not cause inflammation as is characteristic of rheumatoid arthritis, although some non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs may temporarily reduce pain symptoms in some patients. Their use, however, is limited, and often of little to no value in pain management.

An epidemiology study comprised of an internet-based survey of 2,596 people with Fibromyalgia reported that the most frequently cited factors perceived to worsen Fibromyalgia symptoms were emotional distress (83%), weather changes (80%), sleeping problems (79%), strenuous activity (70%), mental stress (68%), worrying (60%), car travel (57%), family conflicts (52%), physical injuries (50%) and physical inactivity (50%). Other factors included infections, allergies, lack of emotional support, perfectionism, side effects of medications, and chemical exposures (Wikipedia, 2011).”

This was a mouthful from the Wikipedia site; however, it is often clear, distinct textbook explanations that speak volumes. Putting these descriptions into my own words is describing my day-to-day life existing with a chronic illness. My experiences run the gamut of descriptions above with diverse symptoms depending on the day, the time of day, the time of year, weather, personal family and social experiences and more. What textbook descriptions don't tell you are the enormity and the fear that comes from living with an illness that is “invisible”. “But, you look just fine”. Perhaps that's because you rarely see someone with a chronic illness participating fully in life unless they are having a *good* day. You also won't read that someone with FMS drops their eating utensils, can't tolerate extremes in temperature, notices a drastic change in their hand writing and other physical skills, and is very very sorry that they have to ask for help in almost everything they do.

In my life as an academic, the symptom of FMS that most affected me was Brain Fog:

Brain Fog in Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and Fibromyalgia

“Brain fog is a classic part of CFS and Fibromyalgia, presenting as:

1. Difficulty with word finding (e.g., remembering someone's name),
2. Word substitution (e.g., calling your husband by the wrong name!), and
3. Loss of short-term memory.

It can be very severe and even frightening, leaving people with CFS/FMS concerned that they are developing Alzheimer's. But they're not. CFS/FMS brain fog is when you keep forgetting where you left the keys — Alzheimer's is when you forget how to *use* the keys!” (Santamarina-Pérez et al, 2011). Brain Fog – or feeling lost because I can't find a word, or perhaps even seeming “spaced out” to others - is a major problem for me, especially when I'm in a flare. Management for Brain Fog in FMS particularly comes from B vitamins, Fish Oils, and Ribose. Q10 is another key factor in helping combat Brain Fog. Optimizing sleep, thyroid support,

reducing sugars and realizing that you aren't crazy or depressed are other ways to combat brain fog. Perhaps the most difficult part of Brain Fog in chronic illness is that the sufferer completely loses the word or thought, usually realizes it's due to their fatigue, but the person (or persons) on the other side of the comment don't understand and judgments begin. Often it is judgment and criticism from others that causes more stress to the individual than the actual fatigue. Social situations are especially difficult when this symptom is at its worst. I experienced difficulties while teaching, and luckily, had a few students that knew me well enough to know what I was going through, so they'd help me out in class. Now, I notice it on the golf course when I'm in a tournament and can't remember my strokes or a certain rule. After many years of hiding this, and all my other symptoms from others, I've learned it's best to be up front with my students – tell them I have an illness that often causes me problems with word recall and some speech. It doesn't mean I'm stupid, it means I'm really very tired. Please have patience with me. And, again, I apologize.

Probable Cause - Unknown

Living with chronic illness is a challenge for many people. Some estimates of people living with chronic illness range from 15 to 120 million in the U.S. alone. Others state that more than 1 in 4 people live with some type of chronic illness. Chronic illnesses are anything from back pain to asthma to lung disease. A chronic illness is any disease or ailment that has a lasting effect on the body. Chronic illnesses are not viral or contagious and may be hereditary or environmental. Causes of many chronic illnesses are unknown, but living with a chronic illness is difficult no matter what the circumstance. Chronic illnesses may, in fact, be the leading factor in workplace absences and definitely present the sufferer with incredible challenges in their personal, social, spiritual, and economic lives. No matter what the illness is, it affects the quality of life of the sufferer, their family, and those close around them. In most cases, there is not a cure for chronic illness; the challenge becomes one of coping and managing on a daily basis. There are a number of coping strategies available to those with chronic illness from medicinal, nutritional, natural, spiritual, and behavioral (Maté, 2004). The key is finding what works best for you and those around you. There is probably not one best strategy that fits, but rather a combination of modalities that help you live a full and joyful life. For the remainder of this work, I apply healing modalities and descriptions based on the chronic illnesses of Chronic Fatigue and

Fibromyalgia predominately; however, whatever the illness or disease that is chronic in nature, all the same principals apply (Hammerly, 2000; Hayes, 2005; Kabat-Zinn, 2009; Maté, 2004; Santorelli, 1999; Sapolsky, 1998).

Life after Chronic Illness Diagnosis [Signs & Symptoms of Condition]

Back to my personal story – a working case study - For a year after I took my first medical leave for my unknown illness, I worked with an insurance rehabilitation specialist, was assigned an understanding mentor at the university, and worked at bringing my mind and body back to some type of shape to return to work. Every day was difficult, and my diagnoses of CFSFMS were for syndromes that a) had no cure; and, b) had lifelong spans. Every day continues to be a struggle. I was able to work my way back into my university position slowly after about five years. I had special schedules, but was unable to attend many meetings or do anything extra other than teaching my classes, supervising my graduate students, and serving on limited committees. I cut down the number of outside conferences I attended from about 5 or 6 to only two per year. I'd lost a substantial amount of ground in my field along with a few large publications. I managed, however, to write two books while on medical leave and 1000 pages on a currently unfinished novel. Unfortunately, due to my chronic illness, I lost too much ground to ever recover. Colleagues who'd been critical before I'd taken medical leave now didn't even talk to me. I was dropped from committees, not considered for grant applications or for joint ventures. I was ill. I had an invisible illness. I looked fine – but I wasn't seen much. What they didn't know was that when I was really down, I wouldn't go out in public. I suffered from sore throats, headaches, shingles (starting in my left ear and running down my entire left side), and fibro-fog (see section on Fibromyalgia). I had difficulties remembering what I was trying to say when I was teaching. I couldn't find appropriate words when in meetings or while presenting at conferences. My writing suffered, as well as did every other aspect of my life. I worked hard at managing my illness while still striving to have some quality of life. I learned that exercise was a key to being able to keep moving. I surrounded myself with only supportive people and gradually worked my way back to a passable daily life until I was injured by a falling door frame... when the door hit me, it ruptured two disks in my back leaving me with permanent nerve and muscle damage in my left thigh. It also landed me back on a medical leave. My already depleted immune and physical system couldn't recover quickly enough for me to continue any kind of normal lifestyle. People

really didn't understand the chronic illnesses I suffered. There was no patience for my being ill. Interestingly, I totally understand where they are coming from. No one likes a sick person. We all like the healthy, glowing, she who can accomplish anything, woman. I was not that woman anymore, nor would I ever be again, or so I thought. Forced to make a drastic change in my life, I resigned from academia.

What the Doctors Tried to Do [Common Medical Treatments for Condition]

Medication, medication, and more medication. Keep your lifestyle the same. Just medicate, medicate, medicate. Medicate with anti-depressants, mood altering drugs, anxiety decreasing drugs, sleeping pills, more anti-depressants to counter act the first ones they prescribe, arthritis medications, lidocaine, SSRIs (steroids), and more. "Inflammation is the first step to healing" (Pearson, 2011 – personal notes page 977). While long-term medications are not effective in overall pain management, inflammation warns us that injury has taken place. Short-term effective pain medications do help the body begin recovery through immediate relief from nerve inflammation and triggers (Pearson, 2011). Modern medicine doesn't really know how to treat CFS/FMS. Thyroid, some, but the other two syndromes, not as much. This stems from the idea that the illnesses are not well understood and that it's easier for a doctor to write a prescription in the five-minute appointment than spend time with a patient and really understand the depths of what the person is trying to say. It really is no wonder that the throat chakra is blocked in nearly all cases of people with chronic illness.

Anatomy & Physiology – All Pain Is Real

Pearson (2011) describes pain cycles – especially the one where our bodies remember pain long after it has passed – as something we can address through yoga. Pearson likens this type of pain to phantom pain one feels in a missing limb after an amputation. Pain triggers, causes or actual injuries have long since healed, but pain is still present and real to the person. During the time of my major back injury, a close friend and colleague of mine who worked as a social worker also experienced a severe back injury. Never quite sure what caused her injury, she was none-the-less incapacitated with back pain. All her medical tests read clear – there was no injury, there was not even any scar tissue, but Julie had pain. Extreme, excruciating, never ending pain. She tried practicing yoga, could not do any inversions; down dog would put her over the edge. She was the perfect example of someone whose brain pathways thought she was still in pain.

Western Medicine prescribed her a drug called Neurontin that changed her brain chemistry, but also changed her personality. Unfortunately, I was given this same drug for my back injury. Realizing the drastic change it caused in my personality, but the definitive lack of pain relief it gave, I quickly left the drug route behind and began walking the more natural path. Julie, however, struggled for many more years on various medications from Neurontin to Lyrica to others. Eventually, she simply stopped the medications, left her job, and changed her lifestyle. She still struggles with her pain cycles, but finds some relief from gentle yoga and swimming. Biofeedback, breathing, pranayama, and retraining the body to correct patterns can over ride chronic pain with patience and time (Sapolsky, 1998).

Chronic Fatigue is an illness that does not show up in the pathology or blood work of an average patient. Fibromyalgia is diagnosed merely by an exclusion of all other things and by tender points located in the fascia of the muscle fibres. Both are considered “syndromes” and not “illnesses” simply because they are a combination of so many things happening in the body. The cause? There is not one single definitive answer. Some say a virus is the initial cause of CFS. Perhaps a strep or Mono virus – there is not one clear source for this as of date. FMS is linked to childhood trauma and/or sexual abuse. The sad part about chronic illness is that my story is not unique. Web MD reported studies in June 2011 that over 100 Million Americans suffer from Chronic Pain.

June 29, 2011 -- More than 100 million Americans suffer from chronic pain at a cost of around \$600 billion a year in medical treatments and lost productivity, according to a report from the Institute of Medicine (IOM).

An IOM committee commissioned by Congress concluded that pain is not optimally managed in the U.S. and that effective treatment of chronic pain will require a coordinated national effort to transform how the public, policy makers, and health care providers view the condition.

The report included recommendations for achieving what the committee referred to as a "cultural transformation" in how Americans understand and approach pain management and prevention.

"We see that for many patients chronic pain becomes a disease in its own right," committee chair Phillip Pizzo, MD, of Stanford University School of Medicine, said at a Wednesday news briefing. "We need to address this in a more comprehensive and interdisciplinary way and include prevention as a very important goal." (Boyles, 2011)

Chronic Illness may be one thing that gets us down, but it will not put us out. Interdisciplinary ways to address chronic illnesses such as CFS & FMS is the key to management of symptoms. But, management of symptoms is not the ultimate goal; healing and living life to the fullest is the ultimate goal. Chronic Pain is complex. Management of chronic pain is complex, but is possible through a multi-faceted approach. This is where Yoga Therapy comes into the picture.

Holistic Therapies [Yoga Therapy View – Chakra focal point of condition]

Over the 15 years of struggling with CFS/FMS taught me that chronic illness requires a management of symptoms. It is a personal journey that involves biochemical interventions such as herbs and medications, structural interventions such as massage and spinal adjustments (thank goodness for osteopaths and massage therapists), and mind-body interventions of relaxation therapy. You might be asking yourself why I've spent so much time on this personal story; well there is a simple answer. An integral key in helping me get my life back on track was incorporating a number of therapies, and not just Western Medicine tactics. I learned that I had to exercise daily or my leg cramps would be so bad at night that I'd not get any sleep or be able to move the next day. I learned to eat mostly proteins and vegetables with very little breads or white foods (including sugar) and take appropriate vitamin supplements (such as Q10, chromium, and a great multivitamin) or my system would rebel. I learned to see an osteopath at least monthly after the back injury and a massage therapist several times a month, more if I had increased pain. However, it was an infrared sauna and daily yoga practice that added heat my body needed along with the removal of toxins built up over years of stress. The infrared sauna immediately helped clear my outbreaks of shingles and cured my chronic acne, eased my muscles when they were too tight to move, relieved my headaches, and helped me relax during times of stress (Black, 2010).

One statistically proven pain relieving modality available to chronic pain sufferers is heat. Researchers in Japan conducted studies on sustained infrared heat on chronic pain sufferers once daily over a four-week period during hospitalization. Pain behaviour, self-rating depression reports, and anger scores significantly lowered over the four weeks. Researchers also found that after two years, 77% of chronic pain sufferers that experienced infrared heat therapy returned to work as compared to only 50% of those that did not (Masuda et al, 2005).

A multidisciplinary approach to chronic pain is the most effective mode of treatment for most sufferers. Infrared heat therapy combined with proper diet, controlled exercise, massage, rest, and appropriate medications help patients manage and control their pain and still experience a full and productive lifestyle (Black, 2010). In 2007, I resigned from academia, increased my yoga practice, changed my diet drastically, incorporated massage, received psychotherapy, and have used an infrared sauna several days a week for 30-40 minutes routinely since 2005. Today, I am happy to report that I: play and walk 18 holes of golf two to three times a week with practice days mixed in between; curl once or twice a week during the winter; sleep much better; have clear skin; work about 30 hours a week for our family business; practice yoga daily; and, enjoy a much fuller and happier lifestyle than I have had for many years. I can't help but wonder if I'd had these tools when I first fell ill, if I could've staved off a career change and followed a different path.

Yoga

While studying CFS/FMS, Arthur Hartz, MD, PhD asked research subjects to list current therapies they used to help manage their symptoms. Two years later, Dr. Hartz asked the same group which therapies they continued to use more than anything else – not only did he find that subjects continued to practice yoga more than any other therapy, they found the greatest benefits to their symptoms from practicing yoga (as reported by Teitelbaum, 2001). Finding the mind/body connection from yoga is key in finding healing and health with yoga. Perhaps the beauty lies in that yoga is not simply exercise; it is complete exercise for the mind, body, and spirit (Francis, 2002). By looking into and practicing all eight limbs of yoga, effective and lasting change is possible for chronic pain sufferers (Devi, 2000).

Eight limbs

Yoga is not simply going to a class or practicing with a DVD a variation of poses and calling them exercise. Yoga is a way of approaching life from the very basic every day actions to our fellow beings to learning, healing, loving ourselves and surrendering to something much greater than we are in hopes of one day becoming one with that very power (Pattabhi Jois, 2002). Yogic systems contain eight limbs beginning with the Yamas and Niyamas briefly described by Pattabhi Jois (2002) in *Yoga Mala* (paraphrased):

Yamas:

Ahimsa – do no harm; Satya – Be truthful; Asteya – do not steal or be envious of others, do not be selfish; Brahmacharya – Be chaste and loyal; Aparigraha – do not hoard, eat pure foods.

Niyamas

Shaucha – be clean & pure, be a good friend; Santosha – be content; Tapas – move and discipline your body; Swadhyaya – study diligently; Ishwarapranidhana – surrender to God or a higher power.

By practicing these basic skills in our attempt at every day life, we can reach into a deeper level of understanding of yoga poses, or asana, that we do practice through movement.

Asana

When the body is in continual pain, we tend to hold ourselves in contorted positions; hunched, grasping, tightening, clenching – fists, teeth, shoulders, legs, lower back, chest, buttocks, and body parts we don't recognize. It is not uncommon to look at someone with chronic pain and see one shoulder higher than another, one hand hanging lower, the head tilted forward or back, the jaws clenched, the chest sunken in. When pain is a constant companion, the body carries it like another being. Pain distorts bodies, diminishes spirits, and leaves one stifled and set apart from the joy of light, energy, flowing spirit. Yoga Asana helps begin to bring movement back into the crippled body. Attitude changes when alignment straightens and gives room for energy pathways to move freely, muscles and sinews to realign to proper positions, and action of life follows. Tightened psoas muscles deep in the body, connecting back to thigh, release through proper movements and the body begins to straighten. Aligning the body through proper spirals from the feet to the head, allow for fuller, greater flowing movement in asana gradually helping to reduce pain and provide relief for the chronic illness sufferer. Along the way, the added benefit of mental energy and feeling a sense of accomplishment helps ones to stand a bit taller and release the darkness of pain (Chow, 2004; Chow & Moody, 2006; Claffey, 2010; Friend, 2009; Hammerly, 2000; Long 2006 & 2008; Stiles 2000).

Asana benefits over time are so great, that even practicing small postures on a daily basis result in significant changes over time. I'm a perfect case in point – slow, gentle asana over many years, kept me moving through the worst pain cycles. When not in a flare (described as a worsening of conditions in CFS/FMS brought on by external stresses such as weather, physical, mental, or emotional stresses), I'm able to practice more vigorous asana, which strengthens my body for times of stress. When in a flare, the healing gift of restorative, gentle poses give me the relief I need from the pain and remind me that a better day will come (Koch, 1997; Claffey, 2010; Friend, 2009). My FMS pain is double sided and moves – usually on a weekly or bi-weekly basis. This means the pain is either in both hands, or both knees, or both shoulders one week and next week it moves somewhere else. It is important to adjust Asana practices accordingly to the shifting changing pain. It is also important to keep a good flow or Prana to allow for an even flow through all the chakras when one may be out of balance this week and openly flowing next week.

Restorative Asana

Incorrect body patterns and holding happen gradually over time. Lumps and bumps and strange body proportions result from computer work, repetitiveness of movement, lack of movement, improper posture and more. While movement through Yoga Asana helps retrain our bodies and minds gradually, Restorative Yoga sets correct body posture and alignment into our muscle memory. Simple Restorative Asana built into an every day lifestyle relieves stress and strain we place on our bodies. It gives us time to restore, rejuvenate, and replenish our system through the long, sustained, restful nature. Legs up the wall – a Godsend for tired, swollen legs, twists for digestion, chest openers to reverse the hunched over a computer syndrome. In my life, Restorative Yoga is the “this is enough, just this is enough” that calms my mind and soothes my body (Pearson, N., 2011). Both Pearson (2010) & Teitelbaum (2001) caution CFS/FMS sufferers to go to the edge of the pain and no further while practicing any yoga asana. “Do more of what feels good; less of what doesn't” (Pearson, 2010).

Rest is an essential tool in CFS/FMS – as much as movement. The best advice I received along my path was from an RN who gave me B12 shots weekly. Ronine told me, “If you push an hour, rest an hour. If you push a day, rest a day. If you push a week, rest a week.” Brilliant advice.

This was the first piece of advice that helped me get off the ground after my drastic fall off the ladder and soon turned into a Mantra for myself and for anyone else with chronic illness. I often say to others, “I can pretty much do anything I want to do; I just pay for it the next day.” With this advice, I know that if I do something major today, tomorrow I will rest.

Pranayama

Breath work is the pathway to our being. Breath work is the one thing we can always practice and utilize in our daily life whether we have complete movement of our limbs, are in serious pain, stress, and/or anxiety. Chronic Fatigue sufferers can breathe. Jon Kabat-Zinn, PhD (2009) states, “As long as you are breathing, there is more right with you than there is wrong”. What a beautiful statement. Even in the depths of fatigue and pain, our breath is the one thing we have. While some pranayama techniques are contraindicated in extreme cases of fatigue (Kapalabhati or Ujjayi if fatigue is accompanied by dizziness or abdominal pain or extreme cases of high blood pressure) (Saraswati, 2008), most breathing techniques are soothing, calming, balancing, and effective for chronic fatigue and Fibromyalgia sufferers (Claffey, 2010). In my own life & illness, Pranayama opened a doorway to calming fears, releasing and managing anxiety in social and work situations as well as improving my golf game!

Moving to Samadhi Through Meditation

For this section, I’m going to link Pratyahara, Dhyarna, Dhyana together before the final goal of Samadhi for Chronic Illness as it is the process leading through the eight limbs of yoga that brings the most relief and benefit for chronic pain sufferers. Simply preparing for meditation, in and of itself, is a meditation as well as a task. Getting the body to a point where there are no pressure or pain points, propping effectively with bolsters, pillows, blocks, calming room environment such as ventilation, sound, and smell all are integral parts of helping the chronic illness sufferer be able to move into meditation. To expect a chronic pain sufferer to sit in a cross-legged meditation for 30 minutes is an unrealistic goal. To help one learn to relax and soften their body for 5-10 minutes several times a day, is more feasible. Teaching them to block out sounds and outward stimuli is key, but also helping them look into their pain, recognize it, love it, and let it pass is ultimately the best treatment possible (Kabat-Zinn, 2009; Pearson, 2011; Bensoussan, 2011).

Pratyahara

Pratyahara is the state where we attempt to turn off all outside stimulation and move into ourselves. Recognizing that all is still there, but following that inner path to find ourselves within is the ultimate goal. “To relax the body and mind fully and deeply, they must be temporarily relieved of their duties” (Devi, 2000). To get to this state while suffering chronic pain is another challenge. Luckily, there are many helps and aids available to all of us, not just chronic pain sufferers, that lead us gently and softly into this state of putting all behind and reaching that path. The inception of applications and song tracks on iTunes and a myriad of self-help CDs and DVDs with mindful meditation practices are helpful. Often, it is difficult to know where to start or which one will work best for any given person. In my experience, I started with one or two short ten to twenty minute mindfulness tracks with body scans and breathing techniques (Kabat-Zinn, 2009; Pearson, 2011; Yee et al, 1996) and now have an entire music library with meditation tracks ranging from 2-60 minutes. Through this process, aided by others, I am now able to reach past the outer experiences and focus more on the task at hand, and/or reach a meditation state much easier. I not only strive to reach this state in meditation, but I utilize it often on the golf course or when in social situations. I knew I was becoming more successful at the practice when I went to tee off one day and didn’t notice all the chatter and noise being made by my playing partners (a definite “no-no” in golf). I took my shot, a very nice drive as a matter of fact, came back to my cart with all the others apologizing for making so much noise. I hadn’t even noticed. My practice of Pratyahara had taken me to a place of Zen Golf (Parent, 2002).

Dhyarna & Dhyana

This becomes the state where we move into meditation. In my practices, I’ve rarely maintained this state for longer than brief moments; however, those brief moments have felt endless and joyful (Hall & Hall, 2009; Stephens, 2010). This is the state where visualization of having a healthy body, performing healthy routines, and seeing myself active in life is most effective. When one is in chronic pain, the movie that tends to play over and over in our heads is one of us being in pain. Reprogramming this movie through visualization of pure health during meditation is one of the most effective healing keys available (Pearson, 2011).

Samadhi

Yoga Nidra

Yoga Nidra – a blessing to the sleep deprived. Yoga Nidra is one of the leading techniques used in sleep disorders and has been a gift sent to me during my training and career transitioning this year. Yoga Nidra allows not only the body to relax, but offers the mind relaxation as well. Even in sleep, our minds are constantly working and churning - my mind especially. It is during sleep that I tend to look for and solve problems or situations in my life. During school, sleep was when the solution to a math or physics problem would come. It was while sleeping that I created some of my best choreography for my dance minor in college. My husband would wake me up during one of my dance movements in my sleep – sometimes that was frustrating – but it always led me to want to go back into sleep and search for the lucid dream state where I could solve the problem and realize a sweet solution. Unfortunately, because of my creative mind and not having the capabilities to restore myself through sleep, illness crept in and sleep became an allusive dream. Yoga Nidra helped restore sleep to my life. My brain is finally able to rest and rejuvenate during a Yoga Nidra session and my night time sleep improved through this rest and practice (Claffey, 2010; Hanley & Deville, 2001). I place this under Samadhi in the Eight Limbs of Yoga as it brings one through all the levels and briefly touches the heavens with Samadhi. Hanley & Deville (2001) in Tired of Being Tired refer to Yoga as “the time honored” practice to relaxation and sleep reporting Shavasana or Corpse pose and repeating mantras to help with sleep. Santorelli (1999) takes meditation to another level in Heal Thy Self teaching one with chronic illness to take mindfulness learned from meditative practices into daily living and not just as an aid to sleep. He encourages one to welcome all that comes into our experience, give it thanks, learn all we can from the moment, and go on. Jon Kabat-Zin (2009) likens living with chronic illness as living life in full catastrophe mode. Meditation, mindfulness, yoga practice with a purpose becomes every day coping and management strategies for chronic pain and fatigue of CFS/FMS.

Chakras

While in a warm bath trying to heal an infection, I practiced an inner child meditation and went back to see my girlhood self (Bensoussan, 2011). She welcomed me at the door of our Coolidge,

Arizona home. While no one was in the home for my meditation, I knew that my dear “Gram” was currently occupying my room during the six-month hospice leading to her death. This was definitely a traumatic time for my childhood Kathie. During this sweet visit while I was definitely focusing on my root chakra to clear an infection, the memories of a painful time where water became a healing tool for the mind and body were definitely present. A few weeks ago I wondered why I “pool used” so many friends during my years of adolescence and adulthood, why being – especially diving - in a pool was so freeing for me. This visit back to my girlhood traumatic time led me to a greater understanding and appreciation of using water to heal. We both carry the scars from those traumatic times, but they are our scars. We can heal them through chakra clearing and appropriate meditation and healing tools.

Today, I was able to put that healing water in a pool to further use. Irritated by all the people around me and in my condo at our yearly writer’s retreat, my friends took me to the swimming pool. Something magical happened the moment I dove into that pool. Sharing sweet time with girl friends – warm, clean, sparkling water, and freedom to move. I’m still a bit irritated at all the people around me (I’m trying to breathe and let it pass) and still suffering from an infection, I feel much better. I feel healing coming closer to me. This brings me to the healing nature of sound along our chronic illness journey. Sound is another tool toward healing (Goldman, 2008; Rinpoche, 2006). I’ve discovered apps for my iPod/iPhone/iPad and headphones! (See section on Pratyahara). Playing piano, Crystal bowls, ringing bells, quiet listening in nature, and more. Resonance of sound physically moves through our bodies as energy.

Reiki

Just for today... Neil Pearson (2011) teaches a mantra during restorative yoga, “Just this. Is enough”. Reiki speaks to me as “Just for Today”. Just for today I can strive not to worry. I can strive to not become angry (I wonder seriously where irritated comes into that picture). I can honor my ancestors (like my dear Gram, even my mother) and my teachers. I can work diligently and honestly. And, I can be grateful for everything. I can be grateful for the time away from home to be with other like-minded people. I can be grateful to be in wonderful mountains and enjoy a ski area even if I went yet another year with no skiing or snowboarding, or that I’m missing out on golf on a sunny day down in the valley. I can be grateful. Just for

today. I can work at my own healing hands, I can help the energy pass through me. I can give myself permission to use healing techniques and stop and say “No”. Will I learn to say no before getting myself into crazy situations like curling three nights in one week and working 10-12 hour days while teaching yoga and being a wife, mother, and grandmother? I’m not sure – but I think I’m getting there. Yoga Therapy is much more than “Yoga” – more than just asana or the Yamas & Niyamas. Healing becomes more – it becomes an understanding to childhood trauma that results in chronic illness and repeated patterns in adulthood. Whether they are addictive or chronically repeated patterns, they are none-the-less damaging to our health. As a house is not built with using a hammer alone, health is built with a variety of healing strategies and tools.

On my journey to filling my “toolbox” so to speak (Bensoussan, 2011), I’m on the Reiki path also. Reiki came into my life in the late 1980s, early 1990s and had the unique gift of helping me through my doctoral work. My Reiki practitioner was named Molly. Molly was not a Reiki Master. At that time, there were only about 6 Reiki Masters worldwide. Today, twenty years later, there are thousands of Reiki Masters. An increase in understanding and practice of this art of Energy Healing work now spans to hospitals, chronic illness treatment centres, and a general worldwide acceptance of this amazing healing technique. (Quest, 2010). Reiki is one tool to add to the Yoga Therapist Tool Box in helping someone heal from illness, injury, or trauma as well as helping promote and generate strong flowing health and energy pathways. Working with Reiki offers me, as a practitioner, greater insight and feeling to a person’s chakras – where blocks are, where energy flows, and to consequent movement of energy through their body (Ellis, 2002; Hay, 1988 & 1999; Quest, 2010; Smith, S. 2010;).

So where do the Chakras fit into this toolbox? (Bensoussan, 2011; Claffey, 2011; Johari, 1999; Judith, 2002 & 2004; Pearson, 2011). The significance of the major seven chakras goes back in history well before the birth of Christ. Folklore talks of Aryans conquering the peoples in India coming in on chariots with golden circles of light preceding them. The chakra system corresponds to not only the mythological stories, but also to biblical accounts of seven – referred to in The New Testament in Revelations as Seven Stars. Medicinal science points to a connection of the seven major nerve centres along the base of the spine and skull with the seven

chakras recognizing that often injury to the spinal chord along any one of the chakras leads to a problem in mental and emotional energetic states related to that chakra as well.

Do we really understand energy? Even as physicists, we are not quite sure what energy is, exactly. We quantify it through theory – Einstein’s famous mathematical equation of $E=mc^2$ (energy = mass of an object times a gravitational constant squared). Even our notion of gravity as $9.82/m/sec^2$ is arbitrary on our given mathematical understandings. Energy affects everything around us. Gravitational pull of planets and celestial bodies affects us. Earth’s gravitational pull and magnetic field (an energetic field locked into rocks giving us our current understanding of geological age), are all unseen energy. We would be small creatures, indeed, if we did not recognize the unseen energy that flows through us at all times through various ways – sound, light, etc. The chakra system is one way of attempting to explain that energy (Pearson, 2011). Theoretical aspects of mental and emotional development of the chakra system are consistent with current educational and psychological theory of child development. Interestingly, childhood trauma is also consistent with blocks and stoppages in smooth chakra flow.

Do we understand all there is to know about our chakras? I would posit that we do not. Can we begin to understand and work with our chakra system as yoga therapists? Absolutely. Healing happens at all levels – if we want to look at those levels from a Yogic philosophical standpoint of the Koshas (subtle bodies or sheaths), we can certainly look to how our bodies are what we eat (Annamaya – the food body) (Claffey, 2005; Kushi, 2003); our breathing patterns and oxygen intake as well as carbon dioxide expulsion in our breath (Pranamaya – breath body); our mental and emotional states (Manomaya); our intellect and wisdom (Vijnamaya); and our capacity as humans to feel happiness (Anadamaya – blissful sheath). From a Reiki standpoint we can examine how energy flows through us into someone else; and, from a Western Medicine viewpoint we can understand blockages in our mental/emotional/physical states from injury, trauma, stress, grief, and loss. Basically, the chakras provide us with a wonderful map to help us guide others to healing. Sore throat? Work on the throat chakra (Vishuddah). Use blue colours, blue lights, blue clothing, yoga poses such as fish and backbends to help the body open the chakra and allow free flow of energy. Each chakra has corresponding colours, sounds, vibrations, and yoga asana that help energy flow. However, it is through mindful meditation that

I feel we can affect the greatest healing in someone. Our minds are so much more powerful than we realize. Let our minds do the work. Rest them in Yoga Nidra, then step back and let them do the work and help heal the body.

Loving yourself – Ho'oponopono Zero Limits

“Ho’oponopono is a process of letting go of toxic energies within you to allow the impact of **Divine** thoughts, words, deeds and actions... Simply put, Ho’oponopono means ‘to make right’ or ‘to rectify the error.’ According to the ancient Hawaiians, error arises from thoughts that are tainted by painful memories from the past. “Ho’oponopono offers a way to release the energy of these painful thoughts, or errors, which cause imbalance and disease” (Vitale & Hew Len, 2007). All our memories from childhood, no matter how trivial to others, were significant to us and are from which we base all our emotions – fear, anger, happiness, joy, pain, frustration, pleasure, or peace (Bensoussan, 2011). Ho’oponopono teaches us to let go of what ever it is we are experiencing and trust the Divine while loving ourselves and the others in us. Ho’oponopono helps us understand that if someone comes to us with a “story”, whether or not we have had that specific experience, it is now in our experience and “now we clean” – meaning we love that part of ourselves and send healing energy out. Ho’oponopono technique is simple: say to yourself, “I love you; I’m sorry; please forgive me; thank you.” That’s it. The mere act of loving cleans us of the negativity of the experience and allows healing. The scientist in me decided to conduct an experiment on Ho’oponopono while practicing any chakra clearing, energy work, interacting with others, or when feeling emotions of any kind. The technique is brilliant. I can personally report overwhelming success in using the practice on myself and around others. I’ve watched energy move and shift, angry or excited people calm, dogs even settle down, and healing of my own body take place in miraculous ways. The trick – if you can call it a trick, is to get your mind to “Zero” state – where there is no emotion, all is calm, all is “zero” and the Divine can work in and through you for healing (Bensoussan, 2011).

Ayurvedic Medicine & Macrobiotics – Healing the Entire Body

What we put into our body is as important as what we do to heal our body. Ayurvedic medicine based on doshic analysis of an individual provides an amazing structural pathway to helping one

heal with food, exercise, meditation, and lifestyle. The main approach in Ayurvedic Medicine is to strengthen and support the body by teaching that all stages of life are normal and natural. (Atreya, 1999; Klebl, 2010; Lad, 1990.) Eating with macrobiotic styles teaches us to utilize foods appropriate to not only our body types and styles, but also our geographical areas. Food is universal – food structures include all parts of humanity and the universe. Mindfully, paying attention to this “fueling” of our bodies helps us reach the balanced and supreme state we are searching for in daily life (Claffey, 2010 & 1995; Kushi & Jack 2003). “Everyone needs to respect his prakruti in order to make life better, to rise to a higher state of health. This is one of the first lessons in learning how to be a balanced person. If you never learn it, higher realities are attainable only in glimpses” (Chopra, 2000. Location 1110 Kindle edition). Balance is the key to managing health. Managing health is the ultimate goal in Chronic Fatigue and Fibromyalgia even if we only realize higher states of health in glimpses. A yogic diet of mostly vegetables with no meat relieves inflammation and allows for body tissues to become lengthened and more pliable (Chow & Moody, 2006; Klebl, 2010). Macrobiotic enthusiasts encourage us to eat breakfast like a king, lunch like a rich businessman, and dinner like a pauper and to be aware of acids and alkaline in our foods (Claffey, 2010). Eating mindfully not only helps us realize what we are putting into our bodies, but also allows us to grow spiritually and mentally through physical nutrients.

Conclusion

A full yoga therapist’s toolbox works wonders for someone with Chronic Fatigue and Fibromyalgia by helping them manage their symptoms and guiding them through healing from trauma and injury. This full toolbox teaches the CFS/FMS sufferer how to: live the Yamas and Niyamas; practice Asana tailored to fit the changing pain of FMS and the fatigue of CFS; manage the one thing we all have from birth to death, our Breath, through Pranayama; gain restful sleep through Yoga Nidra; focus the mind and relax the body by meditation; balance and heal chakras; and tailor food intake to enhance all parts of their life.

Walking our given path while in this lifetime is not simply left to chance, genetics, or what our parents chose for us. While all these things definitely play a major part in who we are, it is our individual, distinctive, significant experiences along our path that blend us into the individuals

we become along the path. My particular path was strewn with major traumatic incidences as a child that I never processed or understood until having to deal with the results of chronic illness as an adult. It is interesting to me to look upon the references for this work and see the majority focus first on when I first received my CFS/FMS diagnosis, a few scattering through the years during other times of crisis, but with the large bulk of information coming forth within the past few years as my healing path became clear to me through Yoga. Not that Yoga is the only thing that has helped in my healing, infrared saunas made a huge difference in helping me heat, study, and realize that I have amazing skills that were not taken away when I fell off the career ladder. This work touches only a brief corner of all the amazing tools now gracing my toolbox of healing techniques to help me heal myself while helping others heal also. Within the past several years living on the ground and on my mat, rather than on the Academic Ladder to perceived success, I not only have seen the path to my wonderful inner child and self, but I've connected more deeply with the Divine who sees in me a strong powerful woman with much to share in helping others achieve better health and healing.

"All teachers must learn. All healers must be healed, and your teaching, healing work does not stop while your learning, healing process continues." Iyanla Vanzant (1998)

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