

Reliable Options for Fibromyalgia: Graston Technique and Clinical Aromatherapy

Fibromyalgia was once an obscure condition, the very word itself capable of prompting looks of confusion or dismissal. At one time called *fibrositis*, the condition is now almost a household term with many people diagnosed daily. This condition of widespread soft tissue pain and accompanying, overlapping symptoms is now taken more seriously, but it is still misunderstood by many mainstream doctors who do not have a cause or a solution.

The source of fibromyalgia has many theories, everything from insufficient nutrition to neurotransmitter imbalance, myofascial constriction to adrenal fatigue, mental illness to hypochondria, the latter most unlikely and ludicrous. Many people in the medical field suspect the condition to stem from a disturbance in the nervous system and the communication of pain signals. This might explain why the syndrome can wreak havoc on almost all organ systems. Those living with this condition know too well how one can look perfectly healthy yet be suffering from unexplainable, severe pain in muscles, tendons, ligaments, and sometimes joints.

The pain can be worsened with exertion, emotional stress, too little sleep, an overly acidic diet, and cold or hot weather. Soft tissue pain, burning, aching, and weakness can concur with irritable bowel and bladder, crushing fatigue, chronic indigestion, severe light sensitivity, anxiety disorders, hormonal imbalance, and intolerance to food and temperature changes. The severity of symptoms can vary season to season, day to day, hour to hour, and sometimes, minute to minute.

Fibromyalgia can develop gradually or come on suddenly after a car accident, fall, or injury. Prolonged emotional stress can also trigger a healthy individual into a lifelong struggle with the syndrome. Some symptoms persist for years while others are transient; some are debilitating while others are constant but in the peripheral.

It may be misdiagnosed as multiple sclerosis, Lupus, or depression. Sometimes fibromyalgia comes with a co-diagnosis of Sjögren's Syndrome, Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFIDS/ME), rheumatoid arthritis, and Myofascial Pain Syndrome. Some medications and treatments may work only for a little while. Sadly, it is no wonder why fibromyalgia encourages health care professionals, bosses, family members, and friends of the patient to chalk it all up to, "It must be all in your head!"

For the person living the Hell that can be fibromyalgia, such a summation can be the straw that breaks the camel's back. Depression is common and can develop along with the plethora of other agonizing symptoms. A fibromyalgia diagnosis twenty years ago made a patient even more vulnerable to such beliefs and criticism than today, but those living with it wish it could merely be chalked up to self-obsessive imaginings. It is not surprising that many allopathic doctors take the "logical", easy way out and prescribe antidepressants to fibro patients. Because of this, it is often assumed that the condition is psychological in origin.

Fibromyalgia pain is linked to neurotransmitter imbalances, especially serotonin and acetylcholine, which in turn can have an effect on mood, but antidepressant drugs can fail to solve deficiencies and glitches within the nervous system and impose undesired side effects to an already burdened body. Often, antidepressants and similar medications prescribed for fibromyalgia compound the problem and make things worse.

There has been widespread assumption among alternative health practitioners that fibromyalgia syndrome stems from a toxic

diet and lifestyle that includes an excess of processed foods and alcohol; however, there are countless people living with fibromyalgia who have a history of adhering to healthier diets and ways of living.

Fibromyalgia does not discriminate, affects people of all ages, and affects both genders. A higher percentage of women are diagnosed, thus some speculation surrounds possible hormonal factors. With so many conflicting theories and findings, only one thing is certain and agreed upon: every person is individual and in need of a tailored treatment program. The fibromyalgia sufferer needs a village to maintain balance, and that village can be comprised of medical doctors and holistic practitioners, among them, massage therapists, acupuncturists, chiropractors, herbalists, and counselors. Unfortunately, most care is not covered by insurance and can also be a hit or miss.

Fortunately, there is much a fibromyalgia sufferer can do to lessen pain and find longer periods of equilibrium, even the one who has literally tried everything under the sun and the one with limited financial resources. There are also newer alternative treatments and combinations of such that are dramatically changing lives.

Graston Technique

Graston Technique® has been around for nineteen years but is only now making its way into therapeutic dialogue. Used by more than twenty-two thousand professionals including therapists, athletic trainers, and respected chiropractors, Graston is a cutting-edge, non-invasive approach to injury recovery and connective tissue disorder.



The Graston practitioner uses six types of stainless steel instruments to rub soft tissue. These tools reach deeply into

layers of muscle to permanently reduce scar tissue and trigger points that prevent blood circulation within the fibers. Trigger points are painful areas that hold the most tension within a muscle. They develop from injury or poor habits such as posture and repetitive movement. Trigger points can also form from physiological stress patterns within the nervous system, creating stubborn and dysfunctional loops of miscommunication between the brain and muscles.

Each muscle is comprised of numerous layers of fibrous tissue that is wrapped in natural cellophane called *fascia*. Fascia not only holds together muscles, tendons, and ligaments but also organs. Trigger points within a muscle can multiply over time, eventually spreading to larger areas of the body and constricting the deepest levels of the fascia. If these critical points are not addressed after an injury, accident, or years of bad habits and stress, the digestive, respiratory, reproductive, and endocrine systems can be adversely affected. What began as a small area in need of help becomes a larger problem compounded by other, more serious conditions.

Many seasoned chiropractors believe that fibromyalgia is actually a syndrome brought on when multiple, unaddressed trigger points go haywire. Over time, the body learns ways of coping and moving to prevent further injury, which can include glitches in the autonomic nervous system. Year upon year of dysfunctional nerve communication, constricted fascia, and blood-deprived muscles can result in serious reduction of mobility and quality of life. Other conditions, seemingly unrelated to the muscular-skeletal system, can develop and become debilitating.

Graston Technique® goes where massage therapy leaves off. Massage therapy is highly effective for fibromyalgia but does not get to the root trigger points. A massage therapist's hands can only reach a few layers of muscle tissue, whereas Graston tools can reach five layers down, where the deepest trigger points fester. Treatments, combined with knowledgeable

chiropractic care and tailored exercises, can yield results quite rapidly. While other modalities might provide temporary relief, Graston combined with other therapies can get to the source of pain and unravel decades of problems within the soft tissue and have a permanent effect.

Essential Oil Therapy

Clinical aromatherapy uses essential oils to increase oxygen to the tissues, reduce acidity, improve circulation, and lessen inflammation. Essential oils—steam-distilled essences from plants, leaves, bark, roots, flowers, and fruit peels—are powerful substances that can gently nudge the body back into balance. Some are also amazingly effective analgesics that work better than over-the-counter ointments as well as prescribed pain medications. When used properly, essential oils do not cause side effects and contribute to overall health of the body's nervous and immune systems.

Application of essential oils can be approached four different ways, all offering great benefits for the fibromyalgia sufferer:

1. Undiluted to the soles of the feet where the pores of the body are the largest, thus providing quick absorption of essential oil particles into the bloodstream where the oils do their work to reduce pain and inflammation. This method is best to calm over-excited nerves and works systemically to bring the body into a more harmonious state. For convenience, applying essential oils to the soles of the feet is best employed at bedtime.
2. Diluted in a little vegetable oil (also called a carrier or base oil) and applied on site to reduce pain, swelling, inflammation, and discomfort in soft tissues and joints. This method can be applied up to four times a day. This method can also be highly effective for

acute pain and when used with massage modalities.

3. Blended with Epsom salts or evaporated sea salt and distributed into a hot bath or foot bath. Aromatherapeutic baths can greatly reduce fibromyalgia pain and promote better sleep. This method is best used in the evening.
4. Inhaled to stimulate the neurotransmitter serotonin which can be alarmingly inadequate in people with fibromyalgia. Essential oils can be applied to a tissue or a specific aroma locket for this purpose and inhaled throughout the day to maintain healthier levels of serotonin and other neurotransmitters.

Note: Pregnant women, epileptics, and people taking medications such as blood thinners should consult a qualified health professional before using essential oils.

Natural Pain-Reducing Essential Oils & Formulas

Fibromyalgia/Myofascial Pain Blend #1

- *2 drops spearmint*
- *2 drops balsam fir*
- *1-2 drops ginger**
- *1 drop juniper berry*

Dilute in 1-2 teaspoons of carrier oil or unscented lotion and apply to affected areas or all over the body 2x a day with a few hours between applications. Especially effective when used in massage modalities.

**Ginger is contraindicated for anyone on blood thinners. Omit or substitute with lavender.*

Fibromyalgia/Myofascial Pain Blend #2:

- 3 drops *eucalyptus*
- 3 drops *black spruce*

Dilute in 1-2 teaspoons of carrier oil or lotion and apply to affected areas or all over the body 2x a day with a few hours between applications. Especially effective when used in massage modalities.

Single Essential Oils for Topical Diluted Application

- **Eucalyptus:** 3 drops per teaspoon of carrier oil or unscented lotion. Mix well and apply to pain sites. Can also be added to bath water by mixing up to 10 drops of essential oil to $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of Epsom salts or evaporated sea salt.
- **Ginger:** 1-2 drops per teaspoon of carrier oil or unscented lotion. Mix well and apply to pain sites.
**Contraindicated for people taking blood thinners.*
- **Helichrysum:** 2 drops per teaspoon of carrier oil or unscented lotion. Mix well and apply to pain sites.
- **Juniper Berry:** drops per teaspoon of carrier oil or unscented lotion. Mix well and apply to pain sites.
**Contraindicated for people taking blood thinners.* Can also be added to bath water by mixing up to 5 drops of essential oil to $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of Epsom salts or evaporated sea salt.
- **Lavender:** 4 drops per teaspoon of carrier oil or unscented lotion. Mix well and apply to pain sites. Can also be added to bath water by mixing up to 10 drops of essential oil to $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of Epsom salts or evaporated sea salt.
- **Lemongrass:** 1 drop per teaspoon of carrier oil or unscented lotion. Mix well and apply to pain sites.
- **Pepper, Black:** 1-2 drops per teaspoon of carrier oil or

unscented lotion. Mix well and apply to pain sites.

- **Peppermint:** 1-2 drops per teaspoon of carrier oil or unscented lotion. Mix well and apply to pain sites. Can also be added to bath water by mixing up to 8 drops of essential oil to $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of Epsom salts or evaporated sea salt.
- **Pine needle:** 3-4 drops per teaspoon of carrier oil or unscented lotion. Mix well and apply to pain sites. Can also be added to bath water by mixing up to 15 drops of essential oil to $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of Epsom salts or evaporated sea salt.
- **Spearmint:** 1-2 drops per teaspoon of carrier oil or unscented lotion. Mix well and apply to pain sites. Can also be added to bath water by mixing up to 5 drops of essential oil to $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of Epsom salts or evaporated sea salt.
- **Spruce, Black:** 3-4 drops per teaspoon of carrier oil or unscented lotion. Mix well and apply to pain sites. Can also be added to bath water by mixing up to 12 drops of essential oil to $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of Epsom salts or evaporated sea salt.

**Note: If rash develops, use only 1 drop of essential oil per teaspoon of carrier oil or unscented lotion, or discontinue use.*

Single Essential Oils for Inhalation

- **Cacao:** 1-2 drops on a tissue or in an aroma locket. Stimulates and encourages utilization of serotonin and dopamine in the body. Inhale for 5 minute intervals up to 4x a day.
- **Lavender:** 1 drop on a tissue or in an aroma locket. Stimulates and encourages utilization of serotonin in the body. Inhale for 5 minute intervals up to 4x a day.
- **Neroli:** 1-2 drops on a tissue or in an aroma locket. Stimulates and encourages utilization of serotonin in

the body. Also calms adrenalin and other stress hormones. Inhale for 5 minute intervals up to 4x a day.

- **Rose:** 2-3 drops on a tissue or in an aroma locket. Stimulates and encourages utilization of serotonin and dopamine in the body. Inhale for 5 minute intervals up to 4x a day.
- **Sweet Orange:** 1-3 drops on a tissue or in an aroma locket. Stimulates and encourages utilization of serotonin, dopamine, and other neurotransmitters in the body. Inhale for 5 minute intervals up to 4x a day.
- **Tangerine:** 1-3 drops on a tissue or in an aroma locket. Stimulates and encourages utilization of serotonin, dopamine, and other neurotransmitters in the body. Inhale for 5 minute intervals up to 4x a day.
- **Ylang Ylang:** 1-2 drops on a tissue or in an aroma locket. Stimulates and encourages utilization of serotonin in the body. Also calms adrenalin and other stress hormones. Inhale for 3 minute intervals up to 3x a day.

Those of us who are living with fibromyalgia in all of its variations of severity and complexity *can* find hope, new methods, and great reduction of symptoms. I have been fortunate to be on both sides of the healing fence and can attest to the fact that the body itself constantly strives for balance, and finding our own individual pathways to wellness is possible only if we don't give up. I am grateful for my husband's insistence to "try one more thing."

Recommended Reading:

- *Gluten, Candida, Leaky Gut Syndrome, and Autoimmune Diseases*
- *Fibromyalgia – Natural Remedies*
- *How To Detoxify and Heal From Vaccinations – For Adults and Children*

- *Cherries – The Superfood You Should Know About*
- *Reduce Muscle Soreness*

Sources:

- *Fibromyalgia & Chronic Myofascial Pain: A Survival Manual* by Devin Starlanyl & Mary Ellen Copeland (new Harbinger Publications, 2001, 2nd Edition)
- *Multidimensional Aromatherapy: Clinical, Practical, and Vibrational Applications* by Marlaina Donato, CA, CMT (Ekstasis Multimedia, 2015)
- Graston Technique – GrastonTechnique.com