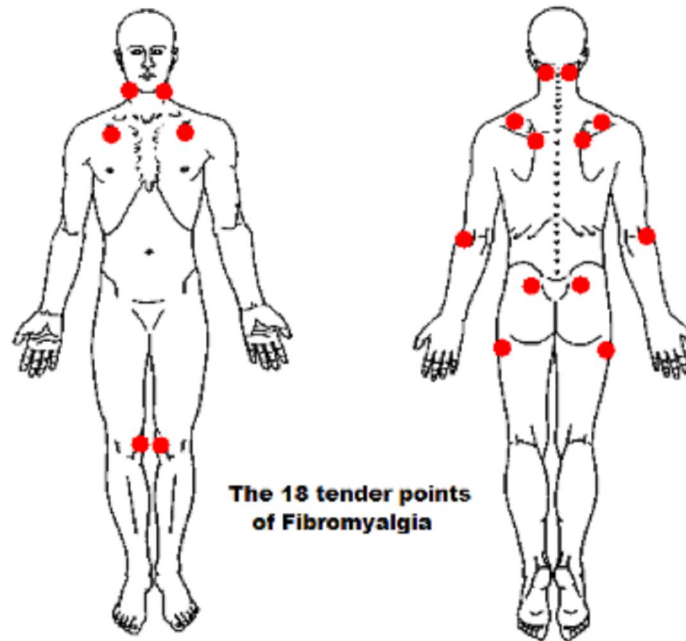


## Fibromyalgia Syndrome & Craniosacral Therapy

By Greg Jolly CMT, CST

Fibromyalgia syndrome is a chronic condition which causes widespread pain and fatigue throughout the body. Fibromyalgia (or FMS) is often described as a deep muscular aching which can be stabbing, shooting, throbbing and burning. FMS is diagnosed by a physician looking at patients with widespread pain for more than 3 months in at least 11 of the 18 tender points when pressed.



Patients may be unaware that these points are tender until pressure is given during an examination by a physician.

Symptoms of FMS can also include: stiffness, headaches, sleep disturbances, gastrointestinal complaints, genito-urinary problems, paresthesia (or numbness or tingling, particularly, in the hands or feet,) temperature sensitivity, skin irritation, dysequilibrium (light-headedness and/or balance problems,) cognitive disorders (also known as fibro-fog,) depression and anxiety.

The pain level and the location of the pain can change day to day in the body of a FMS patient. The fatigue of FMS can also vary ranging from a mild, tired feeling to the exhaustion of a flu-like illness, with some patients being able to complete daily tasks with mild discomfort while others suffering from near complete disability.

FMS does not cause the visible symptoms that other chronic pain conditions show, such as the swelling in the joints associated with arthritis. Over the years, this has made FMS to be difficult to diagnose. However, a critical symptom that most physicians believe must be present in order for there to be a diagnosis FMS is sleep disturbance. Nearly all FMS patients report poor sleep quality to some degree.

Estimates are that up to 10 million Americans have been estimated to have fibromyalgia, most prevalent in adult women. While estimates are that women are 10 times more likely to get this disease than men, FMS also occurs in children, the elderly, and men.

For many years FMS patients were frequently misdiagnosed with depression or anxiety disorders and were told, "it's all in your head." However, research has repeatedly shown that fibromyalgia is not a form of depression. Not surprisingly, given the constant pain, people with FMS often suffer from depression and anxiety which can exacerbate the FMS and make treatment more difficult.

Conventional treatment of FMS includes sleep medication (to improve the quality of sleep,) antidepressants, nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory agents (NSAIDs), growth hormone therapy, cognitive behavior therapy, exercise, physical therapy, diet, and identifying and eliminating food allergies.

CranioSacral Therapy (CST) is a gentle, hands-on method of evaluating and enhancing the functioning of the craniosacral system. The craniosacral system includes the membranes and cerebrospinal fluid that surround and protect the brain and spinal cord. This fluid has a rhythm or pulse, not unlike the pulse of the cardiovascular or respiratory systems. This rhythm is about 6-12 cycles per minute in a healthy person.

By utilizing a gentle touch, a CST therapist feels the rhythmic flow of the cerebral spinal fluid looking for restrictions in the bones, muscles and fascia. (Fascia surrounds and infuses every organ, duct, nerve, blood vessel, muscle and bone.) These restrictions may be the result of physical trauma, emotional trauma, stress, poor posture or bad biomechanics (the way we move.) Restrictions lead to pain of many kinds because they decrease the fluid flow, which directly impacts the nervous system.

The CST technique is gentle and non-invasive. Even children, the elderly, and those suffering from fibromyalgia can receive it. The client is fully clothed and usually lies supine on the massage table.

According to fibromyalgia-symptoms.org, “craniosacral therapy is highly regarded by many fibromyalgia sufferers. A large percentage have tried craniosacral therapy at least once, and have found it to be extremely effective at reducing their symptoms of fibromyalgia syndrome.”

In a study published in the Journal of Musculoskeletal Pain in 2004, craniosacral techniques, appear to be effective in treatment of FMS. With 61 percent of the FMS patients reporting pain levels decreasing by 50 percent or more.

In a study published in the Journal of Evidenced Based Complement Alternat Medicine in September of 2009 entitled “Influence of Craniosacral Therapy on Anxiety, Depression and Quality of Life in Patients with Fibromyalgia,” a double-blind clinical study showed that fibromyalgia sufferers who received craniosacral therapy experienced lessened pain, anxiety and depression, and improved quality of life and sleep patterns

I often utilize a combination of CST with John Barne’s myofascial release (MFR) when treating fibromyalgia. MFR works to eliminate fascial restrictions throughout the body. According to Myofascialrelease.com, ‘Fascia has a tensile strength of over 2,000 pounds per square inch. In other words, fascial restrictions have the potential of exerting enormous pressure on pain-sensitive structures producing pain or malfunction of the delicate pelvic structures.’

Often, FMS patients present with many craniosacral and myofascial restrictions. By eliminating these restrictions, the patients simply feel better.

*Greg Jolly CMT CST provides Advanced Craniosacral Therapy and Myofascial Release at the Aurora Wiselives Center for Well Being. Greg has practiced as craniosacral therapist in Milwaukee for the past 20 years. He has been certified as a Craniosacral Therapist (CST) by the Upledger Institute. Greg holds both state and national certifications (NCBTMB) in massage therapy. Greg has also trained extensively in Visceral Manipulation with the Barral Institute and Myofascial Release with John Barne’s Myofascial Treatment Centers.*