

Fibromyalgia & Yoga

by Maggie Racich

What is fibromyalgia?

- A syndrome, not a disease (no specific, identifiable cause)
- Chronic pain disorder characterized by the following:
 - abnormal pain processing
 - widespread pain & multiple tender points
 - sleep disturbances and fatigue
 - psychological distress
 - headaches/migraines
 - skin sensitivity, rashes, etc
 - additional symptoms can occur
- Possibly genetic or caused by physical trauma
- 3-6% of the world affected, 75-90% women
- Diagnosis usually between 20-50 years old
- Non-degenerative, non-progressive, and non-curable

Questions & Concerns for Students

- How long have you known about/had symptoms?
- Do you have any other similar or overlapping syndromes/diseases (Lupis, Myofascial Pain, Chronic Fatigue, etc)?
- What is your current level of physical activity?
- Where do you experience pain?
- Are there some movements/positions that you cannot comfortably do?
- Which movements/positions feel good?
- What other side effects besides the pain (fatigue, etc)?
- Is there a time of day when movement is easier?

Short Term Goals

- Find movement that does NOT cause pain
- Focus on pranayama and comfort in poses
- Make each practice specific to the day
- Let go of mental anxiety and frustration

Long Term Goals

- Increase energy levels and mental clarity
- Decrease fatigue and pain in the body
- Build regular asana and pranayama practice
- Address other symptoms through yoga practice

Considerations & Modifications

- Often pain is very acute in joints and hips
- Fatigue is a huge factor - focus on *conserving*, not spending, energy
- Emotionally and mentally tiring disorder because it affects daily life SO intensely
- **Everyone with fibromyalgia has a different experience & symptoms - really individualize the practice**
- Avoid prolonged (or any) time directly lying on the hips/side
- Avoid postures that require extreme isometric pressure on tender areas
- Encourage movement on the same level
- Include restorative postures, when comfort can be attained

Testimonial from Michelle “Firegrace” Baas

During my pregnancy I was in so much pain from my expanding hips and all that added weight on my back and legs, that fire dancing, yoga and warm baths were really the only thing that kept me going. Since I have been dealing with the pain, tension headaches, and daytime sleepiness that comes along with fibromyalgia for the last 6 years, I believe that my most effective techniques for resolving the pain are receiving shiatsu and massage therapy treatments, relaxing and drinking warm tea on a sofa with a nice heating pad, warm baths, wearing slippers, bundling up in the cold weather, wearing lots of layers especially over my hips, as well as gentle hatha yoga, and continuous fire dancing. I have been moving, stretching, and dancing for my whole life. If I ever get sick, or find myself with a schedule that is too busy to stop and stretch them I always regret it later! Most of my pain is in my back, neck, shoulders, and hips so my all time favorite yoga poses that relieve the most stress are the ones that really work those areas.

Michelle’s Favorite Poses

1. Forward Lunge
2. Gentle Supine Twists
3. Cobra
4. Triangle
5. Eagle Arms (“that one stretches my shoulders to no end, but it really relieves my tension headaches”)
6. Gentle Seated Forward Fold
7. Downward dog
8. Ragdoll/Forward Fold

* Other poses that are more strengthening feel good and positive too (like warrior and chatterunga) but the above stretches really help to relieve the pain. I think the twists and strengthening poses help more long term.

Resources/support groups:

<http://www.fmaware.org> - National Fibromyalgia Association

<http://www.fmpartnership.org> - National Fibromyalgia Partnership, Inc.

<http://www.fibromyalgiahope.com> - Fibromyalgia Hope

- Acupuncture Today - March 2005, Vol. 06, Issue 03
- "The Fibromyalgia Advocate: Getting the Support You Need to Cope with Fibromyalgia and Myofascial Pain Syndrome." by Devin J. Starlanyl
- Fibromyalgia and Chronic Myofascial Pain: A Survival Manual, ed. 2, Devin J. Starlanyl and Mary Ellen Copeland
- Mayo Clinic <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/fibromyalgia/>