Fibromyalgia

*What is it?*

Fibromyalgia (FM) has been defined as a “painful non-articular condition of unknown cause predominantly involving muscles” (Simon, 2010).

*Symptoms in brief*

There is usually a history of widespread pain and fatigue, which may be worsened by stress, cold and activity. Sleep is frequently affected, and there may be associated abdominal symptoms, headaches, urinary symptoms and difficulties with memory and concentration (“fibro-fog”).

*Medical treatment*

Medical treatment on offer includes medication (such as antidepressants and painkillers), talking therapies (such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and counselling) and lifestyle changes (such as exercise and relaxation)

*Herbalist approach*

A herbalist aims to address the underlying cause(s) of the FM, rather than the symptoms alone.

Initially this will involve taking a thorough case history, for approximately one hour, asking questions about all organ systems, past medical history, family history, diet and lifestyle, in addition to those questions about symptoms currently being experienced. This allows the herbalist to begin to gain insight as to possible underlying causes of the FM.

It is this thorough history taking which allows the herbalist to select and combine a number of herbs for each individual with FM – no two people are the same! Consequently, it would be very rare for two people with FM to be given the same combination of herbs – not all herbs are suitable for all people. For example, liquorice would not be suitable for someone with high blood pressure, or turmeric for someone taking warfarin.

*It is especially important to identify any factors which may be currently exacerbating the FM, for example, digestion issues.* It is impossible to overstate theimportance of this!

*Herbs selected*

*Not all herbs are suitable (or safe) for all people.* Also, herbs are rarely given singly. Rather, a combination of herbs is selected which collectively address the person’s symptoms, whilst still taking the rest of their medical history into account. It is equally important for the herbs chosen to work well together. Carefully selected herbs are able to augment the effects of each other.

*Some research and information resources*

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