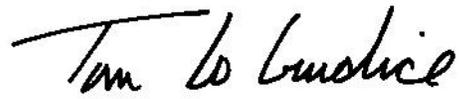


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Date: April 16, 2016

FIBROMYALGIA AND WOMEN

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A Seminar Paper

Presented to

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Education

Adult Education

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by

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## ABSTRACT

Fibromyalgia is a chronic pain disease that affects 10 million people in the United States (NFA, 2014). The word fibromyalgia comes from the Latin term fibrous tissue (fibro) and the Greek word for muscle (myo) and pain (algia) (NIAMSD, 2012). Fibromyalgia is most common in women but it can affect men as well. Fibromyalgia does not favor any specific ethnic or racial groups. Most women are diagnosed in their middle ages but symptoms usually appear in early stages of life. A review of literature and conclusions and implications are provided.

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## **Chapter One: Introduction**

Fibromyalgia is a chronic pain disease that affects 10 million people in the United States (NFA, 2014). The word fibromyalgia comes from the Latin term fibrous tissue (fibro) and the Greek word for muscle (myo) and pain (algia) (NIAMSD, 2012). Fibromyalgia is most common in women but it can affect men as well. Fibromyalgia does not favor any specific ethnic or racial groups. Most women are diagnosed in their middle ages but symptoms usually appear in early stages of life. For those women that have fibromyalgia severe enough; it can be very painful and interfere with their daily tasks (NFA, 2014). Diagnosis is a long process since there are no exact tests to identify fibromyalgia. There is no known cure for fibromyalgia moreover; Fibromyalgia may last a long time. Symptoms may get better or they may worsen over the years (Medline Plus, 2014).

The main focus of literature for the proposed paper is women in their daily struggle with fibromyalgia and how they cope and get through their daily life struggles. There is evidence of how women cope with daily living skills. There are also some new treatment options that medicine has come up with to help with fibromyalgia.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The study is a report on the literature from peer reviewed, and popular sources related to fibromyalgia.

### **Significance of the Study**

Given the extent to which people, especially women, report fibromyalgia providing lay understood information on the subject is important.

## **Statement of the Problem**

There are at least four problems that are addressed in this paper on fibromyalgia. How does fibromyalgia affect women? How do women with fibromyalgia cope with daily living skills? What are some physical and mental symptoms caused by fibromyalgia? What are some treatment options available to treat fibromyalgia?

## **Definition of Terms**

**Fibromyalgia** is a “chronic syndrome that is characterized by musculoskeletal pain, often at multiple sites. The cause is unknown. A significant number of persons with fibromyalgia also have mental disorders, especially depression. Many also have overlapping symptoms of other so-called functional somatic syndromes—especially chronic fatigue syndrome—such as fatigue, stiffness, irritable bowel syndrome, and sleep disturbances. It is common in young and middle-aged women. No treatment has been proved fully effective, although medications, physical therapy, or counseling may reduce disability and help the patient cope.” (Merriam-Webster, 2014)

**Effect** is “an event, condition, or state of affairs that is produced by a cause.” (Merriam-Webster, 2014)

**Cope** is to “deal with and attempt to overcome problems and difficulties —often used with; learning to cope with the demands of her schedule.”(Merriam-Webster, 2014)

**Skills** are “the ability to use one’s knowledge effectively and readily in execution or performance.” (Merriam-Webster, 2014)

**Symptoms** are a “subjective evidence of disease or physical disturbance; broadly: something that indicates the presence of bodily disorder.” (Merriam-Webster, 2014)

**Treatment** is the “technique or actions customarily applied in a specified situation.” (Merriam-Webster, 2014)

### **Delimitations of Research**

The literature was obtained by using the key terms fibromyalgia, effect, cope, skills, symptoms, and treatment in the following search engines Medline plus, EbcoHost provided search engines that were productive, and Google scholar. Most, but not all of these sources were peer reviewed. The following websites were also used: the website of Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases, US Department of Health and Human Services, BioMed, National Guideline Clearinghouse, National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine, Center for Disease Control and Prevention, National Fibromyalgia Association. Peer review is not necessarily a quality of Website information or popular magazines or books. However, every effort was made to use books that had been reviewed. The search was done over the summer of 2014. As noted the literature is a mix of peer reviewed and other sources.

## **Chapter Two: Review of Related Literature**

Fibromyalgia is a chronic pain syndrome that has affected a lot of women, men and children. Fibromyalgia history can go back as far as 1783 when a person named Ramizziniz complained of muscle pain and fatigue with repetitive motion. Most doctors viewpoints on fibromyalgia are: "If we don't understand it and if we can't measure it, or cure it with surgery or a pill then it doesn't exist in reality Therefore, The condition is in the mind, a mental disorder, or the person is faking it."(Gillick, n.d.) Fibromyalgia is the number two most frequent Rheumatology diagnosis made. There are many factors to look at when a woman has fibromyalgia. The women must look at symptoms, causes, diagnosis, treatments, coping, and their lifestyle when they think they have fibromyalgia.

### **Symptoms**

The major fibromyalgia symptoms include deep muscle pain, painful tender points, and morning stiffness. Other major symptoms of fibromyalgia include sleep problems, fatigue, insomnia, depression, fibro fog, sensitivity, and anxiety.

Fibromyalgia is a severe deep pain in the muscles and extreme muscle tenderness. Some women with fibromyalgia describe their symptoms as a flu-like sickness that does not go away. The pain can be in one spot for some women and different areas for the next person. The pain can move around the body as well. The pain can be so severe for one person that the person is bedridden or milder where the next person can do day to day activities even though it is still a struggle. The nervous system and nerves control everything in the body from the muscles to joints to organs. As the nervous system is on warp drive, the nerves are constantly flaring. The

part of the nerves that carry pain signals are constantly being worked and stimulated so the person has pain everywhere in the body. Fibromyalgia then is making the nerves are on hyper drive and making the nerves over react. Fibromyalgia pain can be deep, sharp, dull, throbbing, or aching pain that was felt in the muscles, tendons, and ligaments around the joints. Some women describe it as muscle and tissue pain that is tender, aching, throbbing, sore, burning and gnawing. For some women the pain will come and go and others, it seems to travel up and down the body. Women are more sensitive to pain and have more pain conditions than men. Women also have more tender points than men. Tender points are found in soft tissue on the back of the neck, shoulders, chest, lower back; hips, shins, elbows, and knees in four quadrants of the body.

After pain and tender points hurting fatigue and insomnia is the next complaint on the list of symptoms. Fatigue is so bad that some women feel like they have worked for long hours and missed a lot of sleep (NFA, 2014). The woman will feel fatigue and have trouble sleeping and wake up stiff with low back pain with muscle spasms, tingling, and achy all over (Bennett, Jones, Turk, Russell & Matallana, 2012). Insomnia will leave the woman unable to sleep for hours or days. They might twist and turn, get out of bed, get back into bed, all before finally falling asleep. The other problem they have is that they wake up every hour or two and can't get back to sleep. The sleep that they do get is rarely a deep sleep or the R.E.M. (rapid eye movement) phase of sleep so when they wake up they feel like they haven't slept all night. Since the nervous system is on overdrive it produces adrenaline, more than what we need. Adrenaline helps to give a person an extra boost as to get out of harm's way. So because women with fibromyalgia have that extra adrenaline going through her body, she finds it hard to relax and sleep (NIAMSD, 2011).

A lot of women with fibromyalgia will complain about the next symptom on the list which is fibro fog. Symptoms will usually leave the person confused and unable to think or find the right words (fibro fog). Concentrating is just not an option when this hits a woman because it will be very difficult to almost impossible to do. Sometimes a woman with fibro fog will panic and believe that they are getting dementia or Alzheimer's disease but this is not so. The over the amount of adrenaline has to go somewhere so it goes up to the brain where it attaches to the brain receptors, making it a decrease in the woman's ability to think clearly. This is not a permanent state because it will come and go causing the brain to fog up for a bit (NFA, 2014).

Other symptoms that women with fibromyalgia could have is the chest pains, jaw clenching at night, night sweats, intolerance to cold, vertigo, skin rashes, weight change, hair loss, sensitivity to sun, sensitivity to taste, smells, and sound, painful feet, low sex drive, restless leg syndrome, and personality changes. Most women with fibromyalgia also have other conditions that overlap with symptoms of fibromyalgia. They could have osteoarthritis, endometriosis, chronic pain conditions, rheumatoid arthritis, IBS (Irritable Bowel Syndrome), function problems with walking, tension headaches, TMJ (temporomandibular joint), anxiety, and depression are just a few. Some women's symptoms can be unbearable and probably feel as though they have to push and struggle to get anything done, leaving the women having a feeling of despair (NFA, 2014).

## **Causes**

The causes of fibromyalgia are unknown at this time, but researchers hypothesize several possible causes. Most researchers agree that fibromyalgia is part of the central processing. The woman with fibromyalgia experiences pain that is amplified because of abnormal sensory

processing (NFA, 2014). There are some factors that may be involved in getting fibromyalgia. Some researchers believe that traumatic event or emotional event (PTSD) like a car accident may be the cause of the development of fibromyalgia. Abnormal pain response in the brain that is responsible for pain may be different in women with fibromyalgia (MedlinePlus, 2014). Some think it is repetitive injuries or illness like a virus or viral infection may cause trauma to the body. Then these illnesses may trigger something that is already present and undetected in the system. Certain diseases (chronic fatigue syndrome) are common with women that have fibromyalgia. Some researchers believe it may be heredity with a gene that is passed down in families often seen in siblings, mothers, and their children. Yet other researchers think it came about spontaneously. Researchers are looking at the central nervous system (the brain and spinal cord) and how it processes pain to try to detect on how women actually get fibromyalgia (NIAMSD, 2011).

### **Diagnosis**

Since fibromyalgia has no known causes it is hard to diagnose. Fibromyalgia also mimics other conditions so it is often misdiagnosed. Most other conditions have to be ruled out before even considering fibromyalgia. It is difficult to diagnose since it is known as an “invisible disorder”. It is real easy for those people that do not have it to dismiss it since there are no visible signs of this disorder. It is easy for healthcare providers to dismiss the symptoms since there are no blood tests or x-rays that can reveal if someone has fibromyalgia. Lab tests do not confirm the condition and the results often make the patient feel like a hypochondriac. After ruling out all other conditions the doctor will consider if the patient has fibromyalgia or not. Most health care providers have to go by symptoms the patient is having and how long they have been having symptoms. There must be three months of widespread pain and pain, tenderness in eight of the

eighteen tender trigger points, unrefreshed sleep, fatigue, and morning stiffness (MedlinePlus, 2014). Pressing on tender points in different areas of the four quadrants can help diagnose fibromyalgia (see attachment 1). They also look at a lot of other symptoms as well as help diagnose fibromyalgia. If a person is diagnosed with fibromyalgia, the doctor will discuss a treatment program to help ease the fibromyalgia symptoms (NFA, 2014).

## **Treatments**

There are a great number of women out there suffering with symptoms of fibromyalgia. There is little improvement in symptoms of fibromyalgia and effective treatments are needed to help women (Hsu, Schubiner, Lumley, Stracks, Claw, & Williams, 2010). Treatment of fibromyalgia is symptom help and function improvement. An approach that uses medication and lifestyle changes may help ease the symptoms and treat fibromyalgia. There are different specialist that are out there to help assist with fibromyalgia symptoms. A person could see a rheumatologist, general internists, pain management doctor, neurologist, therapist, psychiatrist, and other specialist that may be helpful in this process.

There are no known medications for effective treatment of fibromyalgia. However, there are several medications that can be taken for symptoms of fibromyalgia. Depending on what the doctor believes what will work best for the woman with fibromyalgia depends on what medications will be used. The purpose of medication is to help improve sleep and pain tolerance. Some of the most common prescribed medications are Lyrica, Cymbalta, Savella were all approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to treat fibromyalgia (NFA, 2014). Other medications that might be used are anti-seizure drugs, antidepressants, muscle relaxants, pain relievers, and sleeping aids.

## **Other Treatments**

Most people with fibromyalgia find it hard to exercise or be active since the pain is so intense and deep in the muscles with painful tender points. Fatigue is one symptom of fibromyalgia that can be debilitating. Not only does the person feel exhausted and weak, but rest does not seem to help. Most women with fibromyalgia if they sleep; sleep eight to ten hours at night and feel as though they have not slept at all. There are some medications that may help the women get to sleep and also stay asleep. Exercise may help with pain and sleep problems of fibromyalgia. Many women with fibromyalgia are unfit. They avoid exercise because they fear the increased pain it may bring. Yet exercise helps relieve pain and depression. Regular exercise increases the body's production of endorphins and natural painkillers. If they start slowly and increase gradually they will be able to exercise without pain. Some yoga style exercise and stretching can help minimize pain and improve sleep quality. On a study done the number of bad days decreased, physical movement and pain decreased greatly at the end of the program and they were exercising three times a week for twenty minutes (Burckhardt, Mannerkorpi, Hedenberg, & Bjelle, 1994)

Water exercising has also helped women with fibromyalgia. Exercising in a heated pool with a therapist seems to help the symptoms as well as movement. The hot stimuli on the nerve endings researchers believe increases the pain threshold which then relieve the muscle spasms. Researchers also believe pain relief is through temperature and the pressure of the water on the skin (Bellato, Marini, Castoldi & Barbasetti, 2012). The water helps to take the weight off so it helps women to be able to move better in the water (Tomas-Carus, Hakkinen, Gusi, Hakkinen, & Ortega-Alonso, 2007).

Another treatment option is acupuncture. Not well known in the U.S. yet acupuncture is new to treat fibromyalgia cases. It shows to have a small effect on pain relieving (Vas, 2011). Cognitive behavioral therapy is also used to help the symptoms of fibromyalgia. This treatment is used to help patients understand the effects that thought, belief and expectations have on their symptoms. The most useful behavioral technique is prioritizing time, so it balances work, school, home, leisure, and daily living skills are all achieved with little or less symptoms (American Family Physician, 2007). There is also massage therapy, biofeedback, ultra sound, and trigger point injections to name a few. Whatever seems to help relieve symptoms can be used for fibromyalgia. It seems that whatever used to improve fibromyalgia symptoms; the treatment will remain challenging.

Some researchers believe that patient education of fibromyalgia is the biggest treatment for managing fibromyalgia. Education on fibromyalgia is given in writing, verbal, videos, demonstrations, and group discussions. An education program was conducted over three to twelve months with a hundred participants and they showed improvement at one month for pain, fatigue, morning stiffness, morning tiredness, anxiety, and depression (Goldenberg, Burckhardt, & Crofford, 2004).

## **Coping**

When having to cope with chronic pain and all the symptoms of fibromyalgia most women had a structured day restricted by daily commitments in order to limit their physical activity. They had self-initiated activities to help them cope. Most women have used the treatments that were mentioned to them from their physician. Yet some women had some coping

skills of their own in order to get through their day. They tried all sorts of therapy to get rid of the pain that they were suffering from. Some women would try pain medications, but only seem to take it when things are at their worst because of the short term effects the medications have and the side effects it may cause. Most women seemed to ignore the pain and continue with what they had to do so the pain would get worse. This is a coping strategy called ignorance of pain. Another coping strategy is isolation of people. Women often do not take part in social activities because with an activity the pain would get worse and most women would not want to explain this to other people. Some women try meditation to relax, but the pain would get so bad that they cannot relax. Women will read a book, go for a walk if they can walk, image pleasant events, or relaxation training, directed by taping instructions combined with gentle music. Then some women even feel hopeless and out of control when in pain as explained in this quote “There is nothing to do to the pain. You can just stay in bed and wait for the pain to disappear. Sometimes I stay in bed for the whole day”; ‘there is no remedy for my pain ... it’s never going to get any better ... I will always be in pain’; and ‘I don’t care about anything... I do nothing at all.” This type of coping is resignation strategy (Hallberg, & Carlsson, 2000). It does not matter how a woman copes with the symptoms of fibromyalgia because it is all just a form of trying to get through another day with this horrific disorder.

## **Lifestyle**

Fibromyalgia cannot be cured. It is a life changing syndrome that women have to live with. Women have to learn to cope and manage their symptoms with the help of their physician, therapist, and psychological therapist if needed. Each woman that has fibromyalgia has different symptoms and different coping skills so no one person is alike with fibromyalgia either (Ryan, 2013).

Women with fibromyalgia also need to come to terms that they have this syndrome. Also that fibromyalgia has rarely any information out there for women. Some women may concentrate on where in their syndrome they are. The beginning stages of fibromyalgia women may be concerned with getting a diagnosis and looking at their symptoms that have no common effect with another person experiencing fibromyalgia symptoms. After being diagnosed women may look at their conditions. After that, women may focus on how to manage their symptoms. Then lastly, women keep updated on recent research to see if there is anything new to help them manage their symptoms (Chen, 2012).

The most important part of having and living with fibromyalgia is a woman taking care of herself. One main factor is to reduce stress if possible. The women should take time each day for relaxation. It may be that the women will have to learn how to say no to certain things that she used to be able to do. Then she needs to get enough sleep. A woman may need to learn new sleep habits and limit napping during the day. Another thing is to try and exercise. The women may have difficulties and increased pain in the beginning, but she will need to learn how to take it slow with gentle stretching. Another important part is to do everything in moderation. A woman may try to do too much on a good day and end up overdoing it causing pain. Then eat healthy and stay away from the saccharine and caffeine and those things that will put the women in a flare. Also any big planning of jobs, like cleaning the house, does it smaller steps. For example, do some cleaning on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday take a break (Women's Health Advisor, 2011).

## **Summary**

Fibromyalgia is a chronic pain syndrome with pain flares that can hit any part of the body. Other symptoms could include headache, fatigue, depression, fibro fog (forgetfulness), anxiety, morning stiffness, and IBS. The diagnosis is hard to find since fibromyalgia is a syndrome that shares many factors with a lot of other conditions. The physician can sometimes diagnose by the history of widespread pain lasting more than 3 months and the presence of pain in the tender points. Treatment may vary according to what type of physician the women may go to and what the physician may prescribe since there are no medications or cures for fibromyalgia. The physician will only be treating the symptoms the woman has. Besides medications the physician may recommend therapy, sleeping techniques, exercise, and acupuncture, massage therapy, biofeedback, ultra sound, and trigger point injections. The most basic thing women may find is the best solution and help her cope is to get educated. Learn to live with the symptoms and do not let the symptoms rule the person (NIAMS, 2004).

### **Chapter Three: Conclusions and Recommendations**

In summary, this paper on fibromyalgia and women may help some women realize what is going on with them and their pain they may be experiencing since fibromyalgia is usually undiagnosed and untreated. Fibromyalgia affects 3 to 6 percent of Americans. The most of those people are women between the ages of 40 and 75.

This information can be used greatly in the adult education field and human service field by recognizing some of these traits in people .By recognizing traits in people with fibromyalgia it will be acknowledged and more out in the wide-open. Women will be able to identify these symptoms that they may have. It will also help others understand that fibromyalgia does exist and there are people out there with this disease and will not have to be worried about people calling it the invisible disease. Many women with fibromyalgia will also get the needed help they may need and are afraid to because it is such an unknown disease.

Don L. Goldenberg, MD, chief of Rheumatology and director of the Arthritis-Fibromyalgia Center at Newton-Wellesley Hospital in Newton, Massachusetts, researched studies that show most women with fibromyalgia spend up to five years to get a diagnosis after they start with symptoms. This is very frustrating for those seeking answers. There is now more of an understanding and knowledge about fibromyalgia than there was 2 years ago. Researchers have yet to find the cause of fibromyalgia, but are getting close with all the theories they have

(Mondell and Wright, 2005 Note. This work has been reviewed by a specialist J. H. Klippel).

Even though they have not found a cure or cause of fibromyalgia, treatment continues to be a challenge. It is difficult to manage chronic pain syndrome symptoms and is frustrating for physicians as well as the women that have fibromyalgia (Vani, Loma, & Colburn, 2009).

Researchers have many new methods for treating fibromyalgia that are being researched now.

Some new research will make a good contribution to the quality of life for women with fibromyalgia in the future. Besides the new methods, women with fibromyalgia need to stay informed. Informed, motivated patients that help themselves will feel better and do better in life.

If fibromyalgia is detected early and women are informed early they will improve (Wallace, 2002).

The existing literature on the topics leads to the following conclusions that fibromyalgia is a chronic pain syndrome that affects women, men, and children. Mostly women get fibromyalgia in their middle ages. Researchers do not know what causes fibromyalgia and there is no cure.

When diagnosing fibromyalgia the physician must look at the symptoms the women are having.

Just because someone else has fibromyalgia does not mean they would have the same symptoms as the next person. Diagnosis of fibromyalgia is hard to detect also. Most physicians go from 3 months of widespread pains all over and 8 of the 18 trigger points hurting as the start to detecting fibromyalgia.

Then physicians look at the other symptoms that the women is having since many symptoms are the same as many other chronic illnesses. The physician looks for morning

stiffness, pain all over, fatigue, irritable bowel, headaches, unrefreshed sleep, fibro fog, night sweats, weight changes, depression, anxiety and insomnia are some to name a few. Treating

fibromyalgia is treating the symptoms. Researchers have not found a medication to treat

fibromyalgia. The purpose of medication is to treat sleep problems, depression, pain, and muscle

spasms. Based on what the physician believes is right for the women. After medication, there are many other treatment options a woman can choose from. There is massage therapy, cognitive behavioral therapy, water therapy, yoga, walking, biofeedback, acupuncture, patient education videos, ultra sound, and trigger point injections are just a few. It just depends on what the women believes are working best to treat her symptoms. Then once her symptoms are in control it is dealing and coping with the fact that she has fibromyalgia. Women cope and show their feelings in different ways. Some get angry, some get sad, and some get on the path and do what they can to help them live a better life. When a women finds out they have fibromyalgia they are going to have to make some lifestyle changes. One thing a woman is going to have to do is to make sure and fit some kind of exercise program into their day. Just make sure to start out slow and gradually work up to where the woman wants to be. Another is to make sure they make a bed time change and get sleep. Without sleep most women will tend to be in more pain. Learn to handle stress because stress seems to start the symptoms of fibromyalgia. Relaxation techniques may help to handle stress. Pacing is a good idea when it comes to having to do all those normal life tasks. The woman needs to just take it slow and easy on those good days. Hopefully with remembering that there is always tomorrow the woman can have a better quality of life. Although fibromyalgia is lifelong, it does not get worse and is not fatal. Everyone's life is different, so the woman needs to realize there is no one size fits all when it comes to fibromyalgia. Everyone is different but yet some have the same symptoms at times.

Based on these conclusions, it is recommended that a woman with fibromyalgia does not give up. Every day there is more and more research being done. Scientists had no idea what might be causing fibromyalgia's severe pains. For years, physicians told women, their pain was imaginary. Now more and more physicians are recognizing fibromyalgia and its symptoms. In

1980 an average of 14 articles was being published yearly and \$100,000 spent on research for fibromyalgia. Fibromyalgia is now more recognized. More than 500 articles are now being published yearly and over \$2 million are spent on research. Hopefully all this attention will cause a discovery in medical history and they find what causes fibromyalgia and a cure for fibromyalgia. (Wallace, 2002).

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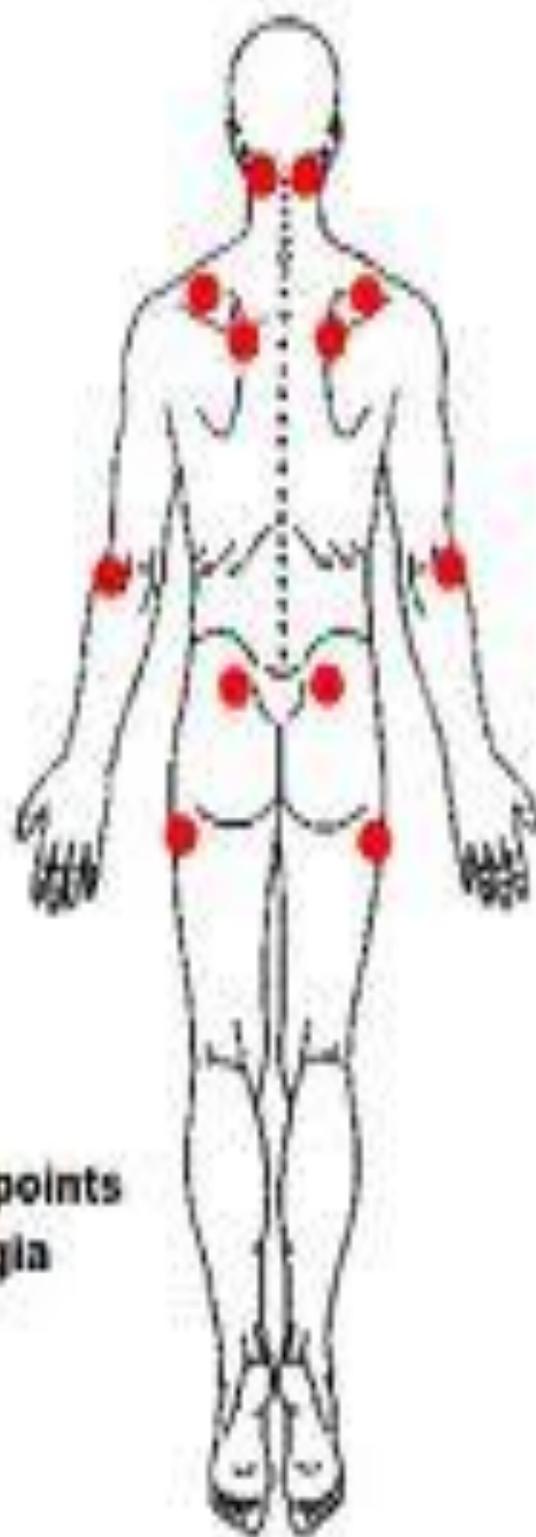
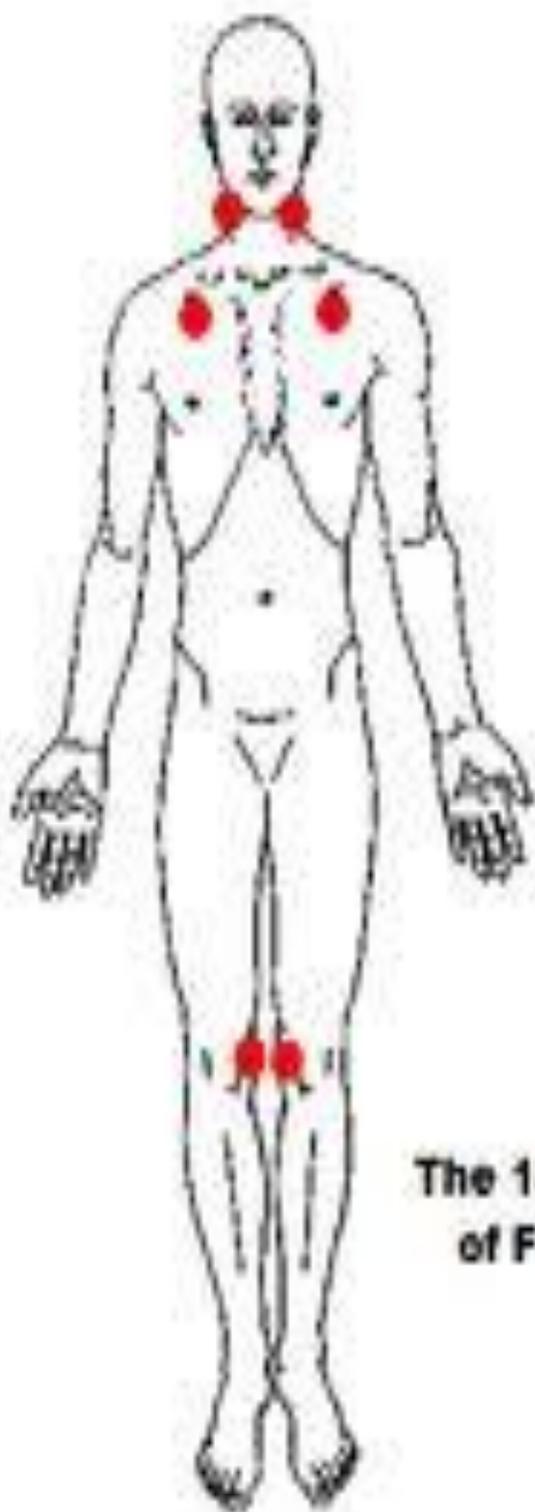
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## APPENDIX



**The 18 tender points  
of Fibromyalgia**

