

Fibromyalgia and Environmental Triggers

Although there has been a great deal of recent interest and writing on the subject of Fibromyalgia and how to manage the painful symptoms, it is almost never suggested that avoidance of certain environmental triggers may be an important management practice. I learned slowly and painstakingly that this is indeed the case for me.

My fibromyalgia was diagnosed after I was diagnosed with Chronic Fatigue Immune Dysregulation and Multiple Chemical Sensitivity. Many of the symptoms of these conditions overlap, but the characteristic painful tender points and extreme diffuse pain were a signal that my condition included something distinctly different from what other MCS and CFIDS patients typically experience.

Because medical practitioners did not tell me that environmental and chemical exposures could trigger or aggravate my FM pain, I did not assume that this would be the case. I only discovered this to be true because of being diagnosed with MCS and I had learned to pay very close attention to my body's messages and to any possible environmental triggers of my symptoms. It was through this process that I discovered that my Fibromyalgia symptoms were aggravated by chemical exposures, certain foods, and hormonal fluctuations and I came to believe that all three diagnoses were actually one in the same with a different subset of symptoms for each syndrome. I unfortunately had all three syndromes symptoms.

The first thing I noticed was that at different times in my menstrual cycle, particularly at ovulation, menstruation, and right after menstruation my Fibromyalgia symptoms would flare. There was a definite and repeated pattern. The tender points on my head, shoulders, legs and buttocks would become extremely painful. I would have accompanying headaches, diffuse body pain, and sleep difficulties. My neuro-cognitive difficulties, often referred to as "brain fog", would also worsen at these times in my menstrual cycle.

If I had been out in the world a great deal being exposed to common everyday chemicals in the days and weeks before my menstrual period, I would invariably notice that all these symptoms would be worse. I also began to see that my Fibromyalgia symptoms would be worse if I had been eating high levels of refined carbohydrates during my cycle.

I discovered that if I washed my clothes in water that was chlorine free and eat organic foods then that made an enormous difference in my Fibromyalgia pain. If I wash my clothes in chlorinated water then the pain is so bad I can't function and I must take my clothes off. If I shower in chlorinated water I will feel comatose. If I have an exposure to pesticides or herbicides such as a neighbor spraying their yard or mosquito control then my all my symptoms flare severely. If I would sit in a room full of people with someone wearing cologne or an air freshener present then trigger points and widespread pain are excruciating and cognitive functioning is impaired severely. If I leave this room and take a shower in filtered water then my symptoms improve. If I stay in that same room for an extended amount of time then the next day I will be bedridden and barely able to walk or function because of pain and brain fog.

If I don't have chemical exposures and if I limit refined carbohydrates in my diet then my fibromyalgia symptoms as well as my MCS and CFIDS will improve dramatically. The more exposures I have or the more refined carbohydrates I eat then the more severe my symptoms will be in each category.

Why this happens, we can only speculate, but I believe that the chemicals are upsetting my body's natural hormonal and endocrine balance. Scientists are now aware that many of the air-borne and food-borne chemicals we are constantly ingesting are endocrine-disrupters. These chemicals mimic estrogen in the body and may contribute to many problems. There is also evidence that refined carbohydrates may interfere with proper endocrine functioning.

Some Fibromyalgia patients may feel that following a strict regimen of avoiding certain chemicals or following a strict diet may not give you enough improvement to justify the effort. However, there is recent evidence to suggest that chemical sensitivity can be the result of a liver dysfunction that is a component of a medical condition known as porphyria. Porphyria has been studied for decades, and it has long been accepted that it is often degenerative in certain types of porphyria, the disability can permanently worsen over time if the patient does not avoid the triggers of their episodes. Although this research is not yet conclusive, it creates cause for concern. In fact Fibromyalgia, CFIDS, MCS and GWS are all related in some way or in fact really just one in the same and if all involve this type of liver dysfunction, then avoidance of chemicals may be an important therapy for these patient groups. I would urge all FM patients to carefully evaluate the possibility that they are reacting to environmental triggers to prevent the possibility of a permanent worsening of their condition.

About the Author

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