

Relief of Fibromyalgia Through Microcurrent Therapy by John W. Addington
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07-11-2001 John Addington is a medical researcher, a patient rights paralegal, and a Chronic Fatigue Syndrome patient. As a freelance writer, he regularly publishes on the topics of Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and Fibromyalgia.

A unique treatment has been pioneered in Oregon that is bringing lasting relief from fibromyalgia symptoms. The treatment entails application of small amounts of electricity to tissue trigger points. Carolyn McMakin, a chiropractor, and her associates have developed this therapy and have been using it for five years in their Fibromyalgia and Myofascial Pain Clinic in Portland, Oregon.

For years now doctors have used electrical currents via instruments such as the TENS (Transcutaneous Electrical Nerve Stimulation) unit to block pain. Further, it has been reported that extremely low dosage electricity when therapeutically applied can speed the rate of healing of sports injuries and fractures. Some feel that small amounts of electricity, measured in microamperage current (millionths of an amp, also called microcurrents), can stimulate healing on a more cellular level. This is because studies have shown that microcurrents can increase the cell's energy and protein production. This therapy can also improve the functioning of cell walls, so that nutrients come in and waste materials leave more readily.

McMakin explains that this care has been successful in a number of chronic pain conditions including fibromyalgia, myofascial pain, temporomandibular joint syndrome, carpal tunnel syndrome, and chronic fatigue syndrome. Additionally, this treatment has brought persistent relief for persons suffering from head, neck, shoulder and back pain. McMakin has published her research and presented it at conferences around the world, including a recent presentation before the National Institutes of Health.

The actual electrical current administered to patients is so minute that it cannot be felt. It is applied through the fingertips of vinyl graphite gloves to various body locations for periods up to 90 minutes. For some patients supplemental small home microcurrent units with 2" x 3" conductive pads are used. Treatments last from several weeks to two years with the microcurrent being applied less frequently as the patient progresses.

McMakin evaluates patients on the initial visit during which she obtains a complete history and performs a neurological and orthopedic examination. At that time she also performs a trial microcurrent treatment. Based upon this evaluation if the patient has fibromyalgia, McMakin determines which "type" of fibromyalgia the patient has. She believes fibromyalgia can be divided into five subsets according to origin in individual cases and she treats each type differently.

The five types of fibromyalgia are: 1) toxic origin (exposure to organic chemicals or pesticides); 2) emotional trauma or stress induced; 3) genetically predisposed; 4) immunologic origin (resulting from viral or bacteria infection or in response to immunizations); and 5) cases resulting from spinal cord injuries. McMakin has had much success with all of these types except the fibromyalgia that is immunologic in nature. That having been said she has found in her practice that the immunologic type of fibromyalgia is extremely rare.

McMakin recently reported a very favorable outcome in a group of 31 patients who had fibromyalgia resulting from neck trauma. These patients had had fibromyalgia for an average of 9.5 years but recovered in less than 5 months following 2 to 17 microcurrent treatments. "Recovery" meant lasting elimination of pain in the frequency and severity normally found in fibromyalgia patients. Physical rehabilitation was sometimes required and all patients were able to discontinue pain and antidepressant medications.

The exact frequency of the microcurrents required varies according to the nature of each individual's problem. Besides the patient's subjective reporting of pain reduction, blood tests have verified microcurrent therapy's benefit. These blood tests reveal that when the precise microamperage is utilized, substance P (associated with transmission of pain sensations) and inflammatory interleukins drop while beneficial cortisol and endorphin levels substantial rise.

Although most persons tolerate microcurrent therapy well, a small percentage do not. For instance patients who react negatively to electromagnetic fields (such as the electrical fields one is exposed to when talking on the phone) usually are not able to withstand this kind of therapy. A very small number also have discontinued treatment due to irritation from the pads that are sometimes temporarily attached to the skin.

To thoroughly manage their patients' care, this Portland clinic complements microcurrent therapy with other treatment modalities. For many patients a modified diet is recommended based upon the results of allergy testing. Several different supplements may be suggested at each visit. Light force chiropractic manipulation and gentle massage may be needed. Mild aerobic exercise is encouraged even if to begin with this can only be done for five minutes at a time. McMakin notes that the patients most likely to recover are those most determined to comply with all such recommendations.

McMakin is not the only practitioner in the United States offering this kind of therapy. She has trained numerous other individuals, some 120 in 25 different states, on the administration of microcurrent therapy.

Neither is McMakin alone in the application of this kind of healthcare generally for fibromyalgia. Research from other doctors has recently been published using a similar device to bring relief. One study published this year

in the Journal of Clinical Rheumatology involved low dose electrical stimulation of fibromyalgia patients' brains through ear clip electrodes worn for one hour a day for three weeks. Sleep problems dramatically improved as well as the patients feeling of well-being and quality of life. Other published research has shown electro-acupuncture is beneficial for various painful conditions including fibromyalgia.

For more details on microcurrent therapy, McMakin and the Fibromyalgia and Myofascial Pain Clinic, contact (503) 762-0805 or visit the Web site www.DrCarol.org.