



FIBROMYALGIA SYNDROME - AN AYURVEDIC PERCEPTION

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ABSTRACT:

Fibromyalgia syndrome (FMS) is a chronic generalized musculoskeletal condition with a strong female predominance of around 10:1 affecting mostly middle aged or old females around 50 years of age. A multifaceted pathogenesis involving physical, mental and social influences leads to fibromyalgia in majority of the patients causing chronic musculo-skeletal pain, frequently associated with medically unexplained symptoms in other systems. According to Ayurveda, it falls into a subtype of disease known as *Vātavyādhi*. The present article is an effort to understand the etio-pathogenesis of fibromyalgia in Ayurvedic parlance along with its management and it may enlighten the path for future researchers to cope with fibromyalgia and provide holistic health care approach.

Keywords: Fibromyalgia, *Vata Dosha*, *Vatavyadhi*, Ayurveda

INTRODUCTION: Pain with its devastating and demoralizing effects remains a challenging problem for both patients and care givers. Fibromyalgia is one of the most common pain disorders, second only to osteoarthritis as seen in rheumatology practices. Fibromyalgia is defined as a chronic pain syndrome with a complex, multi factorial and not completely known etio-pathogenesis that affects mainly women, It is characterized by generalized musculoskeletal pain and palpation specific tender points, often associated with sleep disorders, fatigue, somatic and cognitive symptoms, as well as psychic disordersⁱ. Due to this Fibromyalgia is a debilitating disorder that has negative effect on quality of life and thus impairing the patient's day to day activities. Disturbed sleep has been implicated as a factor in the pathogenesisⁱⁱ. Other risk factors include life events that cause psychosocial distress such as marital disharmony, alcoholism in the family, injury assault, low income and self reported child abuseⁱⁱⁱ.

Fibromyalgia is a clinical diagnosis based on the characteristic signs and symptoms^{iv}. According to Ayurvedic view, it can be compared with certain conditions discussed under the umbrella of *Vātavyādhi* which occurs due to imbalance of *Vata Dosha*. Modern medications have a limited role in the management of fibromyalgia so patients prefer to use alternative medicine as well as in non-pharmacologic modalities that provide long-term disease management such as Ayurvedic system of medicine along with exercise, behavioral and education. Ayurveda provides a wide variety of time-tested dietary, herbal and lifestyle recommendations to help balance *Vata* and remove the symptoms caused by its aggravation.

MATERIALS AND METHODS: Available authentic books viz. *Samhitas* as well as modern medical books used for the specific materials. Different related websites on internet, magazines, articles etc. have also been referred as literary materials and a humble attempt has been made to draw conclusion.

PATHOPHYSIOLOGY OF FIBROMYALGIA IN MODERN VIEW:

Although the aetiology remains unclear, characteristic alterations in the pattern of sleep and changes in neuro-endocrine transmitters such as serotonin, substance P, growth hormone and cortisol suggest that regulation of the autonomic and neuro-endocrine system appears to be the basis of the syndrome. People with fibromyalgia have reduced delta sleep in a pattern distinct from that seen with depression. A reduced threshold of pain perception and tolerance at characteristic sites throughout the body is characteristic of fibromyalgia. Low level of serotonin metabolites in CSF and low levels of somatomedin C - a mediator of growth hormone have been found in most of the patients and related to extended periods of pain following exertion. The high levels of a neurotransmitter-substance P may play a role in spreading muscle pain. The frequent co-morbidity of fibromyalgia with mood disorders suggests a major role for the stress response and for neuro-endocrine abnormalities. The hypothalamic pituitary axis (HPA) is a critical component of the stress-adaptation response. In FMS, stress adaptation response is disturbed leading to stress induce symptoms^v.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS: Fibromyalgia is a syndrome that consists of the following signs and symptoms^{vi}:

- Chronic widespread pain (in the right and left side of the body, above and below the waist, and in the axial skeleton) of long duration (≥ 3 months) as the primary, hallmark symptom
- Fatigue
 - Sleep disturbance, including non-restorative sleep (feeling unrefreshed after a night's sleep)

These 3 symptoms typically occur in most patients with Fibromyalgia syndrome.

Other key associated symptoms include:

- Tenderness
- Stiffness
- Mood disturbances (e.g., depression and/or anxiety)
- Cognitive difficulties (e.g., trouble concentrating, forgetfulness, and disorganized thinking)
- Multiple other unexplained symptoms and functional impairment of activities of daily living.

DIAGNOSIS OF FIBROMYALGIA SYNDROME^{vii}:

Fibromyalgia is a diagnosis of exclusion and patients must be thoroughly evaluated for the presence of other disorders that could be the cause of symptoms before a diagnosis of fibromyalgia is made. , such as Hypothyroidism, Rheumatoid arthritis, Systemic lupus erythematosus, Polymyalgia rheumatic, Other inflammatory or autoimmune disorders etc. The diagnosis of Fibromyalgia is based on the criteria for the Classification of Fibromyalgia by the American College of Rheumatology, (ACR) 1990. The criterion involves:

- History of widespread pain has been present for at least three months.
- Pain in both sides of the body, above and below the waist. Pain is considered widespread when all of the following are present:
 - Pain in 11 of 18 tender point sites on digital palpation (both side of the body): Occiput (2), Low cervical (2), Trapezius (2), Supraspinatus (2), Second rib (2), Lateral epicondyle (2), Gluteal (2), Greater trochanter (2), Knee (2).

However, not all patients with fibromyalgia meet these criteria, but still these are useful guide to make the diagnosis.

INVESTIGATIONS: Patients of fibromyalgia usually do not have characteristic abnormalities on routine laboratory testing or imaging studies, but it is important to screen for other diseases with similar manifestations and to assist in diagnosis of certain inflammatory diseases that frequently coexist with fibromyalgia. Such tests include the following:

Laboratory testing, such as complete blood count, erythrocyte sedimentation rate, rheumatoid factor, antinuclear antibody, thyroid-stimulating hormone, T3, T4, creatinine phosphokinase, a serum muscle enzyme, vitamin D, ESR, CRP, renal function, and liver function tests are necessary to rule out other disorders. X-rays, specialized scans such as nuclear medicine and CT scan, muscle biopsy are normal in cases of fibromyalgia.

AYURVEDIC ASPECT:^{viii} Fibromyalgia can be described as '*Mansa Dhatugat Vata* or *Mamsavritta Vata* (diseases of vitiated *Vāta dosha* in muscles and tendons). According to Ayurveda, *Vata* one among the three *Dosha* is responsible for all types of macro and micro movements including of stimulation, secretion, circulation etc. and hence can be considered a factor for nervous system stability and activation. Aggravated *Vata Dosha* destabilizes the nervous system and can create hypersensitivity leading to pain and tenderness. Accumulation of *Ama* (toxins) and *Srotorodha* may also be contributory factors. Additionally, it involves dysfunction in *Mamsa Vaha Srotasa* and *Mamsa Dhatvagni*. In addition to it *Pittaja* and *Kaphaja* involvement may also produce variations. Thus, all these factors along with vitiated *Vata Dosha* may induce multiple and widespread pain in muscles ultimately fatigue, cognitive difficulties and sleep disturbances. Pathogenesis of fibromyalgia may start in two

ways. In the first case, is a *Vata* predominant individual when favourable factors like poor nutrition, sleep disturbances along with stress and anxiety occurs *Vata* gets vitiated and affects *Mamsa* and other related structures producing pain, fatigue, mood disturbance. In the other pathogenesis, formation of *Ama* or due to vitiation of *Pitta*, *Avarana* of *Vata* takes place causing tenderness, stiffness, along with widespread musculo skeletal pain. In this condition patients may also present with additional symptoms of *Ama* or *Pitta* aggravation. Hence while planning a line of treatment for fibromyalgia from Ayurveda point of view, these mentioned factors are to be considered and accordingly line of treatment has to be planned.

AYURVEDIC APPROACH OF FIBROMYALGIA TREATMENT^{ix}:

The aggravation of *Vata Dosha* or accumulation of *Ama* (toxins) are the primary causes and should be treated mainly. Associated weak digestion, constipation, and effects of chronic stress should also be tackled. So the treatment of fibromyalgia, which is primarily a *Vātavyadhi* disease, focuses on both *Vāta Shamana* (re-balance) and *Samshodhana* (purification) along with management of *Ama*.

PANCHAKARMA THERAPY: This is the main line of treatment in this disorder and ideally is the initial intervention in fibromyalgia if the patient has no contraindications. Pre-purification measures namely '*Snehan*' and '*Swedan*' are very effective to balance '*Vata*' and helps to dissolve toxins. Medicated oil is applied to the entire body followed by fomentation therapy with herbal decoction. This *Snehana* and *Swedana* therapy provides a deeply soothing and balancing effect to *Vata*. The friction and movements massage creates heat which enhances circulation

and helps cleanse the *Ama* or other impurities that could be aggravating and hypersensitizing nerve tissues. For these purpose –*Bala Taila / Ksheerbala Taila / Mahanarayana Taila / Kottamchukadi Taila / Dhanvantara Taila* etc can be used.

Patients with predominance of *Kapha* can undergo *Vamana* by using *Madanphala Yoga*. Similarly with *Pitta* aggravation, *Virechana* can be planned with *Trivritta Avaleha, Avipattikara Churna, Eranda oil* or *Triphala Churna* depending on *Koshtha*. In stress prone individuals who have sleep and mood disturbances, *Sirovirechana* or *Nasya* can be planned. Patients with constipation, debility and other *Vata* predominant features may undergo *Matra Basti* or a schedule of *Kala* or *Yoga Basti*.

AYURVEDIC PALLIATIVE MEDICINES: If there is pain or stiffness or tenderness–*Dashamula Kwath / Dashamularishtam* 30ml twice /day^x or *Rasnadi Guggulu* 2pill TDS or *Yograj Guggulu* 2 pill TDS^{xi} or *Simhanad Guggulu* 2 pill TDS^{xii} can be prescribed.

If pain is associated with fatigue – *Rasayana Churna* 3gms or *Chayvanaprasha, Bala Churna, Ashvagandha Churna* or *Gokshura Churna* can be given with milk or water twice or thrice daily

If there is mood swing / sleep disturbances then *Mansyadi Kwath* 10gms twice daily / with

Brahmi Churna + Sankhapusphi Churna + Jatamansi Churna can be prescribed along with other medicines as per requirement.

DIET AND NUTRITION:

The diet normally advised for patients of fibromyalgia is a modified *Vata*-pacifying diet (*Pathyam*). It should include:

- Vegetable juices and soups prepared from Guard, bottle guard, carrot, tomato, pumpkin, spinach, beet root.
- Coconut water

- Kichadi (recipe made by cooking red / bran rice and mung dal.)

- Warm milk with spices like cinnamon, cardamom, ginger and clove

Fibromyalgia patients should avoid the following food articles (*Apathyam*) and behaviors:

- Hot (spicy) and fried foods; processed, excessive salt or sugar; very bitter and astringent foods, cauliflower, brinjal, potatoes.
- Excessive tea, coffee, alcohol, curd, chocolate, cocoa, milk.
- Sleeping during the day and staying up late at night
- Mental tensions like worry, anxiety, fear, stress and grief.

PRACTICE OF YOGA^{xiii}

It is documented that fibromyalgia is often worsened by excessive stress, anxiety and mental fatigue. There are hormonal changes and other biochemical responses to stress that can aggravate the nervous system, and the immune response and affects quality of sleep pattern which in turn aggravates the fibromyalgia syndrome. Various stretching exercises are known to have a positive effect on fibromyalgia. Regular practicing of different yogic postures are helpful. *Shavasana* (Corpse posture) brings about a relaxed state of mind, *Pranayama* (Yogic breathing practices) create a state of restful alertness in mind and body.

CONCLUSION: Fibromyalgia is a common rheumatologic syndrome characterized by widespread chronic musculoskeletal pain, fatigue, sleep disturbance as a hallmark of the disease and other symptoms as a result of dysregulation of neurophysiologic function. Many theories of etiology are under investigation. Recent scientific studies suggest that specific ar-

eas of the brain and specific neurochemicals (i.e. substance P, endorphins, nerve growth factor) may be involved in the pathophysiology of fibromyalgia and research in these areas are ongoing. Many patients diagnosed with fibromyalgia can be helped by improved nutrition, appropriate life style modification, proper exercise, and Ayurvedic system of medicine. More Ayurvedic scholars should turn their attention to this disabling syndrome, so that the future prognosis will improve for those affected by fibromyalgia.

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