

THE KAPLAN CENTER FOR INTEGRATIVE MEDICINE

# 18 Things You Should Know Before Selecting a Physician to Treat Your Fibromyalgia Syndrome

CONSUMER GUIDE

The following original, copyrighted material was created by Dr. Gary Kaplan. To learn more about the Kaplan Center for Integrative Medicine and its team of healthcare providers, please call 703-532-4892, or visit our website at [www.kaplanclinic.com](http://www.kaplanclinic.com).

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# 18 THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW Before Selecting a Physician to Treat Your Fibromyalgia Syndrome

*by Dr. Gary Kaplan*



*Hello! I'm Dr. Gary Kaplan, founder and medical director of the Kaplan Center for Integrative Medicine in McLean, Virginia. Fibromyalgia (FM) is a frustratingly complex and debilitating disorder, and in order to obtain relief from the pain and the fatigue associated with the disease, you need to find a physician with expertise in its diagnosis and treatment. I have developed this free guide to help you with that process. I hope it shortens your search for an effective treatment plan, and helps you along your road to better health. And please, feel free to share this guide with others who may benefit from it.*

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## No. 1

### Learn about Your Illness & Find a Legitimate Medical Expert to Work with You.

The first step to finding a doctor who can help you is to make sure that you yourself to recognize the *symptoms* of the disease, such as generalized muscle pain, fatigue, sleep disturbances, etc. And it also requires that you understand a bit about the *triggers* that can set off Fibromyalgia Syndrome, such as an injury, illness, or emotional trauma – events that can impose significant stress upon your central nervous system. Learning more about the factors that could be causing or contributing to your symptoms can help you think about your illness in new ways, and hopefully allow you to find a more complete solution.

In the last few years, there has been a growing awareness of FM, and this is a very good thing. Unfortunately, we also have seen an increasing number of patients who, previously, have received an erroneous or incomplete diagnosis of FM. For example, recently we saw a patient, who, although she had been correctly diagnosed with and treated for FM, continued to suffer with disabling pain and fatigue. After prescribing additional testing for her, we discovered she also was harboring a co-existing, but overlooked, biotoxicity disorder (see Section #6 for more information about biotoxicity). Once this problem was addressed, the patient made great progress.

How could this happen? One difficulty is that fibromyalgia shares symptoms with many other illnesses. In addition to biotoxicity disorders, patients suffering with serious hormone imbalances, autoimmune disorders, insomnia, musculoskeletal injuries, also can experience the generalized pain and fatigue associated with FM. Furthermore, although Fibromyalgia is a disorder of the *central nervous system*, it often coexists with pain that is *muscular* in origin, and that component of your pain can be cured, or greatly alleviated, with appropriate treatment. ***Your doctor must be able to distinguish FM from any co-existing problems that could be creating symptoms, which, though similar to those of FM, require their own, targeted treatment.***

*What to look for:*

You need to find someone with extensive clinical experience in diagnosing and treating ***not only FM, but a whole range of chronic illnesses and pain disorders.***

*Bottom line:*

The more you know about fibromyalgia, its onset, and your treatment options, the better job you can do of evaluating a physician's ability to help you recover or better manage your illness.

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## No.2

### Check Credentials.

*What to look for:*

As a patient, how can I assess whether a physician is actually an ***expert*** in managing FM?

*1) Academic and Training Credentials:*

Ideally, your physician will be board-certified in one or more of the following specialty areas: family medicine, pain medicine, physical medicine and rehabilitation, anesthesiology, or neuromusculoskeletal medicine, or osteopathic manipulative medicine. "Board-certified" physician have passed a national exam that comprehensively evaluates their ability to successfully diagnose and treat patients suffering with chronic pain and illness.

*2) Depth of Professional Experience:*

While board certification is an important gauge of a physician's knowledge and expertise, it can't replace experience. The specialty of pain medicine is a relatively young field dating back only about 25 years, and board certification in this area has only been available for about 20 years. You really want to work with a doctor who has seen the trends in this evolving field come and go, and now is a "seasoned expert" in diagnosing and treating chronic illnesses like

FM. Look for someone who can coordinate every aspect of your care, including not only your medication, but also whatever manual therapy, nutritional supplementation, and even the emotional support you may need to recover fully.

*Bottom line:*

If you are living with fibromyalgia, it's crucial you find someone who is a legitimate expert in managing chronic pain conditions. Your physician's certifications will give you a basic sense of his or her ability to help you. Family physicians, internists, and physical medicine doctors are already trained to think in terms of returning their patients to overall optimum health. Their training, combined with extensive clinical experience managing FM, is likely to provide you with the highest level of care.

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## No.3

### To Get an Accurate Diagnosis, Your Doctor Must Take the Time to Listen to You.

*The problem:*

Unfortunately, in some medical-care settings, doctors have very limited time to thoroughly investigate the complex underlying *causes* of your chronic pain, therefore, many physicians reach a diagnosis based on a brief physical exam and description of symptoms. Thereafter, health care providers are only able to see the symptoms that support that initial diagnosis, and are unlikely to notice other signs and symptoms that might lead to a different diagnosis.

To correctly treat any condition, you need a correct diagnosis. To arrive at an accurate diagnosis, your physician not only needs to understand your symptoms and how they are affecting your life; he or she also needs to determine what “event” may have triggered your condition. The causes of fibromyalgia and the mechanisms that sustain it are multidimensional and may include traumatic injury to your muscle, bone, or nervous tissue, bacterial or viral illness, environmental toxins, neurological disorders, chronic depression, post-traumatic stress disorder – to name just a few. ***Understanding more about the triggering mechanisms of your FM will help shape the course of your treatment program.***

*In our experience:*

There is only one way to arrive at an understanding of what triggered the onset of fibromyalgia in your body: ***Your doctor needs to spend a substantial amount of time with you, asking you questions and listening to your history, including what treatments have and haven't worked for you in the past.*** This involves exploring the onset of your condition,

the specific nature of your pain sensations, and the overall status of your health, including your mental health history, social/family history, travel history and exposure to environmental toxins. Your physician also should conduct a comprehensive physical exam and assess your need for additional diagnostic testing. In our practice a first appointment takes at least 60 minutes.

Follow-up appointments range from 30-60 minutes, which, again, allows sufficient time to evaluate your progress, provide treatment, and if necessary, adjust your treatment plan.

*Bottom line:*

If you want an accurate, comprehensive medical diagnosis and an effective, individualized treatment plan, ***only work with a physician who is able to give you the time and attention it takes to properly evaluate and treat your condition.***

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## No.4

### Understand Your Diagnosis and Make Sure You Receive an Individualized, Comprehensive Treatment Plan.

I cannot stress enough how important it is that you understand what your diagnosis is, and frequently, this is one area where practitioners fall down. A diagnosis is not just a label. You need a physician who will take the time to hear your whole story, evaluate all of the contributing factors to your problem, ***and then spend the time that it takes to explain your diagnosis or diagnoses to you in terms that you understand.***

And before you invest more of your physical, emotional and financial resources in another disease management strategy, make sure your physician is willing to work with you to create a personalized and comprehensive treatment plan and that fits the context of your life. Your treatment plan should be multidimensional, addressing not just medication, but also nutritional issues, the need for manual therapies, exercise, counseling or stress management skills.

Expect your doctor to provide you with resources to help you better understand your own condition; and expect him or her to lay out clear recommendations for your short and long-term treatment, including steps that you can take to assist with your own healing process.

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## No.5

### Are Sleep Problems Making You Tired AND Increasing Your Pain?

#### *The risk:*

If you are sleeping an average of only five to six hours a night, the odds are that your ability to think and function on a day-to-day basis is equivalent to that of someone who is operating under the influence of alcohol.<sup>1</sup> For optimal health, most people need an average of seven to nine hours of sleep per night. Sleep deprivation -- caused by insufficient sleep or poor quality of sleep -- impairs the body's immune system, physical reflexes, emotional stability and cognitive functions. It can also lead to an increase in muscle, joint and nerve pain. In addition, sleep disorders can sometimes be caused by pain or be a *symptom* of other serious illnesses such as clinical depression, heart disease or sleep apnea.

#### *Example 1 – Fibromyalgia:*

Most patients with fibromyalgia and many patients with chronic pain from other causes demonstrate an impairment of a specific component of sleep called “alpha-delta-wave sleep.”<sup>2</sup> Sleep-wave-pattern disturbances appear to have a significant impact on pain and play a role in some psychiatric conditions such as depression and post-traumatic stress syndrome.<sup>3</sup> Stress-reduction techniques, sleep-hygiene tips, nutritional supplements, acupuncture and some medications may be needed to restore normal sleep patterns.

#### *Example 2 – Sleep Apnea:*

Chronic fatigue can also be a symptom of a common, but often undiagnosed sleep disorder, known as sleep apnea. Sleep apnea is a condition where a person will stop breathing for variable periods of time during the night. This interrupted breathing results in a decrease in the concentration of oxygen in the blood, which can result in serious health consequences such as elevated cholesterol, heart disease and decreased longevity. Sleep apnea will also make chronic pain much worse. If you have sleep apnea, you also need to be very careful about taking medications. Sleeping pills, antihistamines such as Benadryl, and all narcotic pain medications can make sleep apnea worse. The diagnosis and treatment of this condition or other sleep disorders is crucial to any comprehensive treatment program for chronic pain.

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<sup>1</sup> Dinges DF. Cumulative Sleepiness, Mood Disturbance Increases and Psychomotor-vigilance Performance Decrements During a Week of Sleep Restricted to 4-5 hours Per Night. *Sleep*. 1997, April; 20(4): 267-277.

<sup>2</sup> Moldofsky, H. Fibromyalgia, Sleep Disorder and Chronic Fatigue Syndrome. *1993 CIBA Foundation Symposium Report* 173:262-79.

<sup>3</sup> Maher, J et al. Sleep Disturbances in Patients with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder: Epidemiology, Impact and Approaches to Management. *CNS Drugs*. 2006; 20(7):567-90.

*What to look for:*

You want a physician who understands the relationship between sleep disorders and pain, and who is knowledgeable about the newer prescription medications to help restore delta-wave sleep as well as non-prescription drug solutions for sleep disorders, such as mind/body relaxation techniques, acupuncture and herbal remedies that can be effective in helping to resolve sleep problems.

*Bottom line:*

If you are attempting to heal from fibromyalgia, your initial medical evaluation should include a comprehensive assessment of your sleep history. In developing your treatment plan, your physician should consider all of your options, including the need for specialized medication to help restore healthy sleep patterns.

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## No.6

### Is Biotoxicity/Neurotoxicity the Root of Your Illness?

*The risk:*

We are all exposed to varying levels of environmental toxins – at home, at work or when traveling – through exposure to molds, insect bites, heavy metals, food preservatives, or other harmful chemical agents. Biotoxicity occurs when the body's normal biochemical systems managing digestion, respiration, joint flexibility, brain function, etc. are impaired after a person has inhaled or otherwise ingested toxins. The painful symptoms of biotoxicity/neurotoxicity are similar to the symptoms of and can manifest as the following disease conditions: fibromyalgia, migraine headaches or chronic headaches, depression, attention deficit disorder (ADD) or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), chronic fatigue syndrome, recurrent sinus infections or chronic sinusitis, asthma that is unresponsive to conventional therapy, or autoimmune diseases such as: psoriatic arthritis, celiac disease, irritable bowel syndrome and rheumatoid arthritis. If your condition has not responded to conventional medical treatment, biotoxicity could be contributing to your condition.

*What you should know:*

In most people, the liver is able to break down biotoxins, so they can pass through the intestines and be excreted from the body. In about 20 percent of the population, however, this elimination process fails. This group lacks the proper liver enzymes to break down toxins, so instead of being excreted, the toxins are reabsorbed through the lining of the intestines back into the body. The body then sequesters the toxins wherever it can - damaging the muscle tissue, nerves and connective tissue in these "holding areas."

*Bottom line:*



If the underlying cause of your pain or illness is biotoxicity or neurotoxicity – and your treatment plan does not include detoxification treatment – your overall recovery is likely to be incomplete and slower than it needs to be. After consideration of your overall medical history, your current symptoms, your genetic makeup, your history of exposure to biotoxins and your lifestyle, biotoxicity can be identified or ruled out as a cause or contributing factor, and your treatment plan can be individually tailored to help resolve your pain problem.

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## No.7

### Should Your Diagnosis Include Untreated Lyme Disease?

Too often we see patients who have been diagnosed with Fibromyalgia Syndrome, but in fact, have been harboring a Lyme Disease or other tick-borne illness for years. Although there is some controversy about the existence of “Chronic Lyme Disease,” in our clinical experience it most certainly exists, and it is a serious problem. Occasionally a Lyme diagnosis is missed because conventional laboratory testing is not refined enough to identify the virus. We utilize specialized testing, through which we can more precisely identify the presence of Lyme Disease. With a correct diagnosis and proper treatment of Lyme, we’ve seen some patients have complete resolution of their fibromyalgia-like symptoms.

Sometimes, the infecting agent is another tick-borne virus such as Babesia Infection, Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever, or Ehrlichiosis. Diagnosing these illnesses also requires specialized lab testing. Knowing that a patient needs to be tested for these infections requires your physician to conduct a thorough physical examination and health history, including travel, exposure to the outdoors, and pets.

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## No.8

### Are Nutritional Deficiencies or Food Allergies Contributing to Your Illness?

*Misconception:*

If I eat a basically healthy diet, I am getting all of the nutrients my body needs to obtain and sustain good health.

*In reality:*

Not necessarily. Furthermore, what is “healthy” for one person may cause problems for another. For example, a person can have a “basically healthy diet,” but still suffer from a magnesium or a Vitamin D deficiency that causes or contributes to muscle pain, joint pain, migraines, fatigue, or a sleep disorder. Similarly, undiagnosed celiac disease, otherwise known as gluten intolerance, can lead to arthritis, anemia, digestive problems and depression. Some patients have other illnesses or genetic weaknesses that prevent them from properly absorbing certain nutrients. Food allergies also can create or contribute to pain problems, including generalized inflammation in the body, headaches, arthritis flare-ups, and muscular pain.

*Bottom line:*

Look for a physician who understands the role that nutrition can play in causing and alleviating some pain conditions. After taking a thorough patient history and determining whether your pain has been responsive to prior therapies, your physician should be prepared to investigate possible underlying nutritional problems. For example, your physician should be familiar with the specialized testing necessary to measure your intracellular magnesium levels and intestinal permeability, and he or she should be experienced in determining when to test for food sensitivities and allergies. Finally, you should seek a doctor who is knowledgeable about nutritional supplements, vitamin IVs, and magnesium IVs and how they may sometimes be used as an alternative to prescription medications.

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## No.9

### Is an Autoimmune Condition Causing or Adding to Your Health Problems?

Although the specific cause of Fibromyalgia Syndrome is as yet unknown, most medical researchers agree that the treatment must be multi-dimensional and tailored to the unique needs of the individual patient. This is even more critical when a patient has been correctly diagnosed as having Fibromyalgia and an autoimmune disease.

There are a number of autoimmune conditions that share symptoms with Fibromyalgia Syndrome and can co-exist with fibromyalgia. Some examples include Celiac Disease, Lupus, Rheumatoid Arthritis, Sjogren’s, Multiple Sclerosis, and other connective tissue disorders. To arrive at a comprehensive diagnosis, your physician must take the time to take in-depth health history to determine the onset of your symptoms, the exact nature of your pain sensations, and what therapies have and haven’t worked for you in the past.

If you are in fact suffering with Fibromyalgia and another autoimmune disease, both

conditions must be treated. Look for a physician who will integrate your care to ensure that you receive the medication, nutrition, manual/craniosacral therapy, psychotherapy, and exercise you need to attain your optimal level of health.

## No. 10

### Are Your Hormones OK? Imbalances Can Contribute to Your Pain and Fatigue.

#### *The risk:*

Hormone imbalances, such as thyroid disease, low estrogen, or low testosterone can cause musculoskeletal pain, increased pain sensitivity, fatigue, headaches, and a host of other problems, including depression, loss of mental acuity, and loss of libido.

#### *What to look for:*

Seek out a physician who understands that a malfunctioning hormonal system can contribute to your pain and fatigue. Ideally, your physician should be skilled in addressing hormonal imbalances using a variety of strategies, including prescription medications, bioidentical hormones, herbal remedies, acupuncture, and lifestyle modifications such as dietary improvements, regular exercise and relaxation. Look for someone who will evaluate the health risks and benefits of using medications and alternative treatments in light of the latest medical research and *your individual healthcare needs*.

#### *Bottom line:*

If you have been suffering with a chronic pain condition, your physician shouldn't overlook the possibility that an imbalance in your hormones could be causing or contributing to your problem. Seek out a physician who is knowledgeable about the relationship between hormonal systems and pain syndromes.

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## No. 11

### Is a Past Injury Affecting Your Recovery?

Although the precise mechanism of Fibromyalgia Syndrome is still unknown, researchers agree that it is the result of a central nervous system malfunction. And although there is controversy within the medical community about the possible role of physical trauma as a

trigger for fibromyalgia, in our practice we have found many patients who, after suffering whiplash or a concussion, have developed fibromyalgia.

If the onset of your fibromyalgia is related to a neck or brain injury, your treatment plan needs to include a very gentle form of osteopathic manual manipulation, known as cranio-sacral therapy. The goal of manual medicine is to release physical imbalances and restrictions within the body's connective tissue in order to increase the blood circulation and optimize neurological function at the site of the initial injury. Craniosacral therapy usually provides some immediate pain relief, but more importantly, it allows the body to heal old injuries and re-set neurologic patterns throughout the body.

Although craniosacral therapy is an important component of addressing the musculoskeletal pain of fibromyalgia, the disorder is by definition complex and requires a multidimensional approach that also includes exercise, medication, cognitive therapy, and, depending upon the individual, some of the other modalities described below (such as other manual therapies, nutritional supplements, etc.).

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## No. 12

### Are PTSD or Emotional Issues Playing a Role in Your Pain?

#### *Misconception:*

Any physical or emotional traumas that I have had in the past or am currently experiencing should be of little or of no concern to my physician.

#### *In reality:*

The relationship between Fibromyalgia Syndrome and psychological disorders is complex; however, it is well documented in the medical literature. In our own practice we have observed patients with fibromyalgia often also suffer with depression, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), or anxiety disorders.

While the mechanism is unclear, it is believed that the coexistence of fibromyalgia and some psychological disorders is due to the physiological nature of the disease – fibromyalgia affects the central nervous system, which includes the neurologic pathways that influence our experience of pain, emotional sensations, and brain function. Another important point to acknowledge is that physical pain is quite simply emotionally exhausting.

For many fibromyalgia sufferers, chronic pain directly interferes with their ability to work, engage fully with their loved ones or enjoy leisure pastimes. In addition, chronic-pain

medications can sometimes undermine patients' executive functioning, including their memory and decision-making ability. In sum, unresolved pain often imposes significant losses in terms of physical, social, recreational and cognitive functioning. Understandably, the long-term loss of these functions often leaves patients feeling frustrated, angry, frightened, sad or even hopeless. Unaddressed, these emotions can 1) make it difficult for patients to follow through with treatment recommendations and 2) disrupt patients' normal sleep patterns which can further weaken the body's ability to heal itself.

Pre-existing psychological disorders and traumas also can lead to or magnify chronic pain conditions. It is not uncommon for some psychological injuries to manifest as chronic illness or chronic pain disorders, and there is substantial medical research demonstrating that adults who experienced severe psychological trauma as children have a much more difficult time recovering from physical-pain syndromes. Patients suffering from clinical depression are more sensitive to physical pain, they experience pain more acutely and it takes longer for their pain to subside.

Unfortunately, many patients with serious psychiatric disorders have trouble adhering to their treatment regimes, including taking medications, which of course, can seriously complicate their course of recovery. Finally, psychological or emotional problems are often associated with sleep problems, and sleep deprivation can cause or contribute to chronic pain. Even patients who are simply "stressed out" because of work, finances or family problems are going to be more susceptible to chronic illness and pain.

*What to look for:*

You want a physician who understands the multidimensional nature of fibromyalgia – a doctor who, in diagnosing your pain problem, takes time to assess not just your physical symptoms, but also your overall physical health, your emotional state, your cognitive functioning and your situational-stress level. You want a physician who works in collaboration with mental health professionals, who helps to educate you about the mental health aspects of your chronic pain condition and who incorporates these mental health components (including stress management), into your overall chronic pain treatment plan.

*Bottom line:*

Choose a physician with a "mind-body, integrative medicine" approach, who has the time to evaluate and address the mental health aspects of your chronic pain problems. Ideally, your doctor will be part of a medical team that includes a psychotherapist with whom your physician can easily consult.

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## No. 13

### Using Medications to Help Manage FM: Benefits & Risks.

Unfortunately, there isn't a pill that cures FM. However, there are a number of medications that can be helpful in alleviating the pain and other symptoms associated with FM. In fact, some drugs, such as Cymbalta and Lyrica, have been specifically approved for the treatment of FM by the federal Food and Drug Administration (FDA). There are also some medications, which, while not specifically approved for the treatment of FM, can be very beneficial. Xyrem is one such drug, which has been very effective for a number of our patients. We are optimistic that it will soon gain FDA approval for treating fibromyalgia syndrome.

Recognizing that many drugs have undesirable side effects, it is critical that your doctor, in formulating the medication component of your treatment plan, consider your particular symptoms, your overall medical condition, and your ongoing response to your prescribed medications.

#### *The risk:*

In the last decade the number of patients in the US who have had severe medical problems as the result of taking prescription medications has risen dramatically. A 2007 report in the Archives of Internal Medicine found that, "from 1998 through 2005, reported serious adverse drug events increased 2.6 fold from 34,966 to 89,842, and fatal adverse events increased 2.7 fold, from 5,519 to 15,107."<sup>4</sup> Medications frequently utilized in the treatment of pain were among the top medications involved in fatal events.<sup>5</sup> A study published in the Journal of American Medicine in 1998 found that even *properly prescribed* medications were between the fourth and sixth leading cause of all hospital deaths.<sup>6</sup>

Medications are extremely important in treating chronic pain, and when correctly utilized, can be truly a godsend in providing pain relief and enabling patients to reengage in your life. They are not without risk, however. Your medications need to be specifically targeted toward alleviating your pain and meeting your unique healthcare needs. You need to be aware of the major potential side effects of any medications you take, including potential drug or supplement interactions. Once you are taking a medication, your doctor needs to follow-up with you to establish whether your medication is actually helping to resolve the problem for which it was prescribed.

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<sup>4</sup> Moore TJ et al. Serious Adverse Drug Events Reported to the Food and Drug Administration, 1998-2005. *Archives of Internal Medicine*. 2007 Sep 10; 167(16):1752-9.

<sup>5</sup> Wysowski, DK. Surveillance of Prescription Drug-related Mortality Using Death Data, *Drug Safety*. 2007; 30(6): 533-40.

<sup>6</sup> Lazarou J et al. Incidence of Drug Reactions in Hospitalized Patients. *Journal of American Medicine*. 1998; 279:1200-1205.

Drug interactions and drug side effects include, but are not limited to: sleep disturbances,

memory impairment, impaired judgment, nutritional deficiencies, muscle spasms, greater sensitivity to pain, headaches, loss of libido, rashes, hair loss, kidney and liver damage, ulcers and heartburn. For example, diuretics can cause the excretion of the essential nutrients potassium and magnesium. Medications that decrease the production of stomach acids, such as Zantac and Prilosec also will interfere with absorption of magnesium. Patients suffering from magnesium deficiency can experience sleep problems, fatigue, increased muscle spasms and pain. Patients suffering from extreme magnesium deficiency are even at an increased risk for sudden death from cardiac arrhythmia (heart attack caused by an abnormal heart beat). Some drugs, such as opioids and antibiotics, change the motility of gut, killing off or over-growing the organisms in the gut and intestines that are needed for proper digestion and the absorption of nutrients. These problems can be addressed, but you need to be working with a physician who is focused not just on pain relief, but on returning you to optimal health.

If a medication causes side effects, then in consultation with your physician, you need to determine if the benefits outweigh the side effects and whether to continue taking the medication. For example, although narcotic medications can provide patients with significant pain relief, their long-term use can interfere with a person's healthy cognitive functioning. Even more than chronic pain, the deterioration of memory and judgment can undermine a patient's personal and professional relationships, and ultimately, their quality of life.

*What to look for:*

The physician you select should be knowledgeable about a wide range of pain treatments, including, but not limited to, prescription medications. There are many options available for treating your chronic pain condition besides prescription medications. For example, in treating chronic joint pain, acupuncture, osteopathic manipulation, physical therapy, and even dietary changes often can be more effective than medication. You may find that by engaging in some of these alternative therapies you can reduce some of your prescription medications.

*Bottom line:*

Look for doctor who prescribes pain medication judiciously and is able to offer you alternative forms of treatment. While medications may help pain, some also have the potential to cause other problems with your health and quality of life. Be confident that the medication your doctor has prescribed for you is truly the most effective and least invasive way of treating your pain and fatigue.

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## No. 14

### Does Your Treatment Plan Address Your Musculoskeletal System?

#### *Background:*

Your musculoskeletal system (muscle tissue and bone) comprises 60 percent of your body's mass. It forms an integrated, interactive framework that supports the healthy functioning of all of your body's organs as well as its circulatory, neurological, psychological, immunological and hormonal systems. Illness and pain can indicate that the musculoskeletal system is out of balance. Recovery from disease depends upon restoring the functioning of this system. In sum, optimal functioning of the musculoskeletal system is essential to resolving disease and maintaining good health.

#### *Misconception:*

"I assume my low-back pain is a symptom of my fibromyalgia, so I 'just have to live with it.'"

#### *What you need:*

A comprehensive physical exam should incorporate an evaluation of your entire musculoskeletal system, including the effect that your posture, gait, and any physical abnormalities might be having on your weight distribution and balance. It will also be critical that your physician take a thorough medical history, including asking questions about the special characteristics of your pain, including its duration and the particular sensations you are experiencing. This will help to accurately identify the cause or causes of your pain problem and eliminate other possibilities. In the low-back pain example provided above, this type of comprehensive process will help rule out other possible causes of your pain, such as arthritis in your lower back, a herniated disk, metastatic cancer, a muscle tear due to overuse, muscle tension due to poor posture, a bone fracture due to osteoporosis, low magnesium, or even psychological stress.

#### *Bottom line:*

Seek out a physician who evaluates and treats not only the particular area that is causing you pain and discomfort, but your overall musculoskeletal system. Your doctor needs to be thinking about the health of your musculoskeletal system as a whole and how it's affecting your overall health.

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## No. 15

### Understand the Value of Non-invasive Manual Therapies to Your Recovery.

#### *Misconception:*

Medication is the most important key to resolving pain.

#### *In reality:*

There are a number of treatment options for resolving FM. Whether your physician can help you identify the right treatment plan for you depends first and foremost upon your physician's personal qualifications as a pain-management expert. Secondly, it depends upon your physician's familiarity with alternative and complementary therapies, beyond prescription medication. There are a variety of manual therapies (besides physical therapy, which is discussed in Section #16 below) that can alleviate the pain and fatigue experienced by many fibromyalgia patients. When these additional therapies are part of a coordinated, comprehensive plan that is tailored to your specific medical needs, your healing can be faster and more complete.

#### *Example 1:*

Some physicians are trained in osteopathic manual manipulation, a treatment modality that focuses on restoring musculoskeletal health. Practitioners of osteopathic medicine offer their patients an additional, non-invasive means of evaluating, diagnosing, and treating medical problems. First your doctor will visually assess your posture, spine, and balance. Then, your physician will examine your back and extremities to check for signs of pain and tenderness or restricted movement. The treatment phase involves the application of manipulative techniques to correct misalignments and relieve joint restrictions which may be causing or contributing to your health problems.

#### *Example 2:*

Some osteopaths, physical therapists, and certified massage therapists are skilled in craniosacral therapy, another manual therapy that allows practitioners to detect and release restrictions and imbalances in the body. Through delicate, but highly sensitive touch, the practitioner evaluates the central nervous system and releases restrictions. Craniosacral therapy may provide symptomatic relief for a wide range of medical problems, including not only fibromyalgia, but also chronic neck and back pain, migraine headaches, scoliosis, temporomandibular joint syndrome (TMJS), and traumatic brain and spinal cord injuries.

#### *Example 3:*

Some massage therapists provide deep-tissue massage, which also can help to release tightened muscles and connective tissue, eliminate scar tissue, increase circulation, boost the immune system, and thereby provide significant symptomatic relief while supporting the body's natural ability to heal itself.

*Bottom line:*

Seek out a physician who is knowledgeable about non-invasive manual therapies that will support your recovery. Ideally, you want doctor who can recommend highly skilled manual practitioners who will communicate with your doctor about your progress and the need for adjustments in your ongoing medical care.

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## No. 16

### Seek Out Physical Therapy that Will Help You Heal.

*Misconception:*

All physical therapy is the same in terms of the providers' training, methodology and quality of care.

*In reality:*

Physical therapists differ greatly in their special areas of expertise, the populations that they serve and in the quality of care that they provide. For example, while some physical therapy training programs emphasize the development of strong manual skills through hands-on experience, others focus on more theoretical knowledge of human anatomy and physical therapy-clinic management. Some physical therapists specialize in working with children and infants; others work primarily with adult or geriatric patients. There are physical therapists who help patients recover from sports injuries or strokes, others who specialize in providing craniosacral therapy, and those who work primarily with patients suffering from pelvic floor dysfunction.

*Background:*

Unfortunately, today much of the physical therapy that is offered to patients is shaped by health insurance guidelines rather than by patients' needs. Insurance reimbursement for physical therapy is based on the number of procedures that are performed during each session. Time spent doing hands-on manual therapy and individualized treatment programs are reimbursed at low rates, even though this type of care produces much greater results for patients.

Insurance coverage guidelines are most often established by diagnosis. Under most

insurance plans, if you suffer from a certain condition, you will receive a pre-set number of physical therapy visits, and your recovery is expected to follow a particular course. Hands-on treatments are used sparingly, and the first few physical therapy visits often focus on using ultrasound, electrical stimulation and hot packs rather than on manual therapy. During the later visits, often whether the patient is progressing or not, strengthening exercise equipment is introduced and the patient is instructed on a home-exercise routine. Except for the initial assessment and reevaluations, all of the treatment and supervision of equipment use can be performed by a physical therapy assistant, who is not trained to provide manual therapy. These treatment guidelines may be fine for most people, however, if you do not fit into the “mold,” many insurance companies will make it very difficult to continue receiving the care that you need.

*What to look for:*

You want a physical therapist with superb manual skills and a comprehensive understanding of body mechanics that specializes in treating chronic musculoskeletal pain problems. Your therapist should spend the better part of an hour working with you, providing hands-on deep tissue physical therapy and teaching you exercise programs that you can do at home to help you regain your strength and flexibility.

*Bottom line:*

Make sure you are working with someone who has the right set of skills to meet your medical needs and the *time* to work with you.

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## No. 17

### Make Sure Everyone on Your Team Is Talking!

*Misconception:*

“I can assume that my doctor confers regularly with my other medical providers about my care.”

*In reality:*

FM is a multi-faceted problem that often requires a multi-disciplinary approach; so in addition to the clear communication between you and your physician, it also is crucial that there also be strong collaboration among the other medical professionals involved in your care (physicians, psychotherapists, physical therapists, etc.). Unfortunately, medical care today is a highly specialized and compartmentalized business, and many physicians are pressured by significant time constraints. This can make close collaboration among your medical professionals a real challenge. The result? When your physician sends you to a physical

therapist, psychotherapist or other medical specialist, there may be little or no follow-up. And even when the person to whom you have been referred sends a written report to your doctor, there may never be an opportunity for the two to talk directly about your progress or to explore alternative treatment strategies that might help you heal more quickly and completely.

*What to look for:*

For the effective treatment of your FM, your best bet is likely to be a pain clinic with a multidisciplinary team offering integrated medical care. Make sure your providers meet regularly to review concerns, share insights and exchange information about your medical progress. Only in this way will your medical team have a clear understanding of what your treatment plan should be and how the different pieces of your treatment plan should be adjusted as you respond to treatment. Once your pain starts getting addressed, timing can be crucial in adapting your plan to keep the momentum of progress moving.

*Bottom line:*

Good communication among your caregivers is key to the successful management of your illness. An integrative mind-body medical clinic can offer you an individualized treatment plan with closely coordinated health services that allows for a more tailored, adaptable, and effective treatment plan.

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## No. 18

### Should I Go to a Doctor Who Specializes in Integrated Medicine? (and What Exactly is That Anyway?)

*Benefits of an integrative medical approach:*

An integrative physician with experience treating your FM will be able to assess your medical condition from a multi-faceted perspective, and is more likely to present you with a variety of treatment options and sequencing of options. For instance, your integrative physician will consider when it makes sense for you to take medication, when acupuncture may be most effective for you, and when focusing on a nutritional approach makes the most sense. You are likely to get a quicker and more complete result when your treatment plan is designed to meet your specific needs.

*What to look for:*

Identify a physician who is not only expert in helping patients with your particular condition, but also one with experience using alternative and complementary medical approaches. An

integrative practitioner is able to use knowledge and methodologies from a variety of medical systems to facilitate healing. These may include family and internal medicine; osteopathic and other manual medicine approaches; pharmaceutical, herbal, homeopathic, and nutritional medicine; medical acupuncture; and mind-body medicine, which incorporates stress reduction and relaxation techniques. The right combination of methodologies needed for your recovery will depend upon your medical history, your present physical and mental condition, and the unique circumstances of your life. The net result: by combining modalities, you've used far less medication and hopefully experienced fewer side effects to achieve more complete resolution of your FM. Using an integrative medicine approach minimizes your pain and maximizes your chances of achieving optimal good health, which allows you to fully re-engage in the life you want to lead.

*Bottom line:*

Integrative medicine is the medicine of the future. It's about utilizing the best of conventional and alternative medicine to get the best possible results for you. Ultimately, it's about excellence in medicine.

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# BoNuS

## 2-Page Checklist to Help You Choose a Doctor Who Can Help You

### Before you schedule a visit, find out:

- How much experience does the physician have in treating fibromyalgia?
- Does the physician work in a team situation? If yes, who is involved?
  - Physical Therapists
  - Psychotherapists
  - Massage Therapists
  - Acupuncturists
  - Osteopaths
  - Nurse Educators
  - Craniosacral Therapists
  - Dieticians
  - Chiropractors
- Does the physician use one particular method to treat pain or does he or she utilize a variety of approaches?
  - Surgery
  - Medical Acupuncture
  - Physical Therapy
  - Medication
  - Trigger-Point Injections
  - Craniosacral Therapy
  - Botox Injections
  - Magnesium IVs
  - Wellness Classes
  - Vitamin IVs
  - Hormone-Replacement Therapy
  - Psychotherapeutic Counseling
  - Osteopathic Manual Medicine
  - Celiac Disease Testing/Treatment
  - Biotoxicity Testing/Treatment
  - Nutritional Supplements
  - Lyme Disease Testing/Treatment
  - Platelet Rich Plasma (PRP) Therapy
  - Thyroid Disorder Testing/Treatment
  - Sleep Disorder Assessment/Referral for Sleep Study
  - Nutrition Counseling
  - Herbal Remedies
  - Prolotherapy
  - Medical Food
  - McKenzie Method
  - Massage Therapy
  - Brain Gym
  - Meditation Program
- Will the physician take a comprehensive look at you and see the pain in the context of your entire life?
- Will the physician design an individualized treatment program to meet your specific needs?
- What are the physician's board certifications? (Of particular interest is whether the physician a specialist in pain medicine, physical medicine and rehabilitation, or anesthesiology.)
- What are the physician's other credentials that would make him or her well-suited to help you resolve your FM? Specifically, is the physician board-certified in family medicine, internal medicine, or integrative medicine?
- Does the physician have a Website? If so, visit it to learn about his or her certifications and credentials and also to get a sense the physician's experience in treating *your specific disorder*.
- Talk to other patients who have been treated by this physician. This is a very good way to find out about the doctor's success in resolving chronic pain problems as well as his or her ability to communicate effectively with patients.

**When talking with your physician, make sure you ask the following questions:**

- “Doctor, what is my diagnosis or all of my diagnoses?”
- “What is the treatment plan? How am I going to get from where I am today to either having the pain resolved, or at least being able to get my life back and dealing with the pain as best I can?”
- “Is there a possibility that biotoxins or neurotoxins are contributing to my illness?”
- “Could I have Lyme’s Disease or another tick-borne illness?”
- After telling your doctor about any fatigue or sleep problems you might be experiencing, you might ask, “Are these issues related to my chronic pain?”
- “Could an autoimmune condition be contributing to my pain and fatigue?”
- “Is it possible that hormone imbalances are increasing my pain and fatigue?”
- If medication is prescribed, ask, “Does the medication you are prescribing for me have side effects that I should be concerned about, and are there any herbal or homeopathic remedies or nutritional supplements that might improve my condition and leave me with fewer side effects?”
- “Are food sensitivities or nutritional deficiencies affecting my health? Are there dietary changes, including nutritional supplements, that I should consider incorporating into my treatment plan? How can you tell if I am adequately digesting both my food and the supplements I am taking?”
- “What do you know about incorporating treatments such as acupuncture, nutritional counseling, herbal and nutritional remedies, manual manipulative medicine, physical therapy, therapeutic massage, and psychotherapy into a comprehensive treatment plan for the resolution of pain? Are there any professionals with these skills whom you trust and work with closely?”