**Reflexology and Fibromyalgia.**

Fibromyalgia is a word that I have heard quite a lot of in the last few years but is one I had never heard of until my 36 year old cousin and client told me she had been suffering with it for years.

In fact it was Marina that took me to Cyprus in October 2011 to talk about Reflexology and how it might help people suffering with Fibromyalgia. With the help of Tracey Smith and her explanation of the paper “**Effects of reflexology on fibromyalgia symptoms: a multiple case study.” (Gunnarsdottir TJ1, Peden-McAlpine C.)** I started to delve into the world of Fibromyalgia.

Fibromyalgia is a rheumatic condition characterized by muscular or musculoskeletal pain with stiffness and localized tenderness at specific points on the body. It is a collection of symptoms that vary from person to person and in different degrees.

Symptoms:

* increased sensitivity to pain
* fatigue (extreme tiredness)
* muscle stiffness
* difficulty sleeping
* problems with mental processes (known as "fibro-fog") – such as problems with memory and concentration
* [headaches](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/headache/Pages/Introduction.aspx)
* [irritable bowel syndrome (IBS)](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/Irritable-bowel-syndrome/Pages/Introduction.aspx) – a digestive condition that causes stomach pain and bloating

There is no known cause but it is likely a number of factors are involved. It is worth exploring this with your client and looking for any possible “triggers”. This will definitely help with the way you treat your client, and allow them to explore emotions and issues they may not have had the chance to deal with.

As with any condition there is also the psychological and spiritual effect that the symptoms also have on the individual especially when they are experiencing constant pain.

I must take a few lines here to explain why I have put spiritual effects in the sentence above. It is my theory that as human beings we are three dimensional. We are physical, emotional and spiritual. As holistic practitioners we need to look at the effects one has on the other.

We are now going to take a look at Marinas’ journey with reflexology and how it helped her.

Marina is a 36 year old, single art teacher in Nicosia Cyprus. She has been suffering with Fibromyalgia since childhood.

**Marinas’ symptoms are**: Chronic fatigue, dizziness, headaches, aching body, TMJ syndrome that causes pain in her ears, eyes and face, migraines, numbness or tingling around the body, irritable bladder and IBS, irritability, sensitivity to light, sound, smell, mood changes, depression, memory and concentration problems caused by chronic pain and anxiety.

**Symptoms Marina saw a change in after her treatments**: less insomnia, more relaxed, less pain, better mobility, relaxed TMJ, less anxiety and the symptoms that came with her anxiety.

**Duration and frequency of treatment**: I saw Marina over a period of 11 months. She had 2 treatments in the same week (Monday & Friday) each month.

**Medication taken at beginning of treatment**: Opium, morphine, anticonvulsants, antidepressants, muscle relaxants and painkillers.

Marina experienced a reduction in her symptoms even after one treatment and decided together with her doctor that she would gradually stop taking her medication. She is now medication free and has been for the last 10 months. She takes some vitamins and supplements such as magnesium and vitamin D as well as Aloe Vera orally as well as food supplements and herbal painkillers all under supervision from her holistic practitioner. Marinas’ gastrointestinal system had been majorly affected by many courses of antibiotics so she now takes probiotics to help replace and repair her gut flora imbalance. In Marinas' own words “I am so happy and proud of the fact I am chemical free”.

**What was the immediate response after reflexology and did it vary?**

Total relaxation! Over the period of 10 months twice she experienced a great boost of energy throughout her whole body. She was up for 38 hours once but knew it wasn’t from her anxiety. She was energetic with happy thoughts and felt very creative. I also remember speaking to her the day after a treatment and her telling me she was still in bed and how she had the most amazing sleep.

**How has reflexology helped?**

She felt reflexology helped with making her feel more serene, relaxed, rested. Her sleep pattern was much better and her muscles felt more relaxed. Her headaches, dizziness and moments of unbearable pain all decreased. Her gastrointestinal problems got better as well. Reflexology helped her understand her body/mind connection much better, feeling it helped her learn to deal with her mind and body in a more functional and holistic way, rather than focus on the Fibromyalgia label. She felt it helped control her pain and the symptoms that go with it which in turn had a huge impact on her mood and this impacted on her relationships with friends and family.

Reflexology helped a great deal with her sciatic nerve atrophy, pain and mobility. Not even her opioid medication helped with that pain. To not have seizures and muscle spasms (which were so painful would make her cry) and to be able to walk and deal with everyday life she thought a miracle. She was able to relax once again something she felt would never happen. Marina is convinced the reflexology was responsible not only for the way she was feeling but also enabling her to withdraw from her medication thus repairing her gastrointestinal system.

**Advice to reflexologists.**

When treating a person with Fibromyalgia or any illness for that matter, it is important to remember Hippocrates words **“It is far more important to know what person the disease has than what disease the person has.”**

I used some visualisation and relaxation techniques to help calm and relax Marina before we started the treatment. I thought this assisted the body and mind to relax and respond more powerfully.

I concentrated on the musculoskeletal reflexes as well as solar plexus, kidney/adrenal and digestion. Linking the brain and coccyx and focusing on the movement of energy up and down the spine. I also gave Marina some hand reflex points to work on. This empowered her and permitted her to take back control as well as have an effect on her body. I believe we have a choice, we either allow the illness to take control of us or we take back control of the illness.

Like anything consistency helps tremendously, it is sometimes the case that people don’t respond immediately or they have a healing reaction and this deters them from keeping up their treatments. Perseverance is the name of the game. Ask your client what they want to achieve before each treatment this helps them have a real target and you have a focus and intention for your treatment.

To say Marina has become one of reflexology’s greatest advocates would be an understatement “ I would love everyone to try reflexology and for them to know that they too can live a happy life with less pain and at times pain free. I love reflexology”.

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“Effects of reflexology on fibromyalgia symptoms: a multiple case study.” (Gunnarsdottir TJ1, Peden-McAlpine C.)

<http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Fibromyalgia/Pages/Introduction.aspx>

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