

The New Fibromyalgia Remedy

**Stop Your Pain Now With
an Antiviral Drug Regimen**

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Understanding Fibromyalgia

Most of us look to our doctors for relief from what ails us. We describe our symptoms and are accustomed to being treated. But what happens when your physician can't pinpoint your ailment? That's often the case with fibromyalgia. With little scientific information about its causes and no single test that says, "this is what you have," doctors are often left with a "last-resort" diagnosis and only a palliative treatment plan. But ruling out other possibilities isn't the only option. Fibromyalgia does have an underlying cause that can be diagnosed with lab tests and it can be treated successfully. Read on to learn more about this condition, and why viruses may be the source.

Defining Fibromyalgia

Often misunderstood and frequently misdiagnosed — that's fibromyalgia. The symptoms have baffled physicians for decades, but it wasn't until the 1980s that scientists accelerated their interest in this disease. Doctors wanted an explanation for the mysterious fatigue and indiscriminate muscle pain that seemed to come and go in some of their patients.

In 1990, scientists at the American College of Rheumatology finally formalized this disease's body-wide symptoms into a definition and set of diagnostic criteria. By

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joining the Latin *fibra* (denoting fibrous tissue) with the Greek *myos* (meaning muscles) and *algia* (indicating pain), the scientists decided on the name, fibromyalgia syndrome.

Unlike arthritis, which can inflame, swell, and damage the joints, fibromyalgia is considered a soft-tissue rheumatism. That puts it in a broad group of musculoskeletal conditions characterized by pain and stiffness originating in the muscles and supporting structures, such as the ligaments, bursas, and tendons. Note that with fibromyalgia the pain occurs in these surrounding tissues rather than in the joints.

Today, fibromyalgia is defined as a condition with migratory pain without any medical evidence of disease — there are no lab tests or X-rays that can be used to make a diagnosis. However, I believe that fibromyalgia can be detected with specific tests if you consider viruses as a cause.

Unfortunately, because few studies regarding this theory have been conducted, most physicians aren't familiar with it. But I believe, from my own experience and that of my patients, a latent virus in the cells causes fibromyalgia. Many of these agents haven't yet been identified. But I'm convinced that the four viruses that I focus on in this book are a root cause of this disease. These viruses are Epstein-Barr, cytomegalovirus, herpesvirus 6, and parvovirus.

Fibromyalgia Symptoms

Many fibromyalgia sufferers describe their illness as similar to a persistent flu. You get it but seem to never get over it. You're tired. You're feverish. You ache all over. Sometimes you even toss and turn during sleep because it hurts to lie in one position for too long. That's how I felt when I first experienced fibromyalgia; whenever I have a recurrence, that's how it always begins. But like me, most

patients have a combination of symptoms, and some occur more frequently than others.

As you likely know, this disease can affect just about every system of the body, leaving sufferers so overwhelmed they can't function. The symptoms of fibromyalgia fit the definition of syndrome, which is "a group of signs and symptoms that occur together and characterize a particular abnormality."

As we'll explore later, some symptoms are linked directly to food allergies and accompanying disease. The following text includes a number of possible symptoms.

Fatigue

More than just being tired, people with fibromyalgia complain of an overwhelming, all-encompassing exhaustion. All of us experience severe fatigue at some point in our lives. We overwork or overplay and get very tired. But with thirty to sixty minutes of rest, most people start feeling okay again. With fibromyalgia, it's as if every ounce of physical and mental energy has left your body, leaving you so overwhelmed that you can barely function or take on the simplest daily tasks. Resting doesn't help. You may be all right for an hour or two but the fatigue recurs. For about 75 percent of fibromyalgia patients, fatigue is a significant, ongoing issue. While we still don't know the mechanism behind this symptom, we know it can be aggravated by poor sleep, depression, medications, and stress. The lethargy and mental exhaustion continue from day to day to day.

Pain and Muscle Tenderness

It's difficult to describe the agony fibromyalgia patients experience with their symptoms. The aches and pains are constant and severe. They may vary in intensity, from

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muscle cramps to knifelike pangs, and they have no boundaries. They surface anywhere and everywhere; perhaps they start in one region and then appear later in another. But, there's actually a rhyme and reason to the muscle pain and tenderness. As we'll learn later in this chapter, fibromyalgia has a specific pattern of "*trigger points*" that must be involved for a diagnosis of this disease.

My fibromyalgia symptoms started as a deep soreness primarily in my shoulders, but also in my wrists, knees, and ankles. I also had a lot of fatigue, which got worse and worse. All I wanted to do was sleep. I gained a lot of weight. I couldn't figure out what was happening. I was in a job that had become very stressful, so I thought that maybe the stress was taking a toll on me.

Harriett
Age 62

Sleep Disturbances

Insomnia and other sleeping difficulties are common in fibromyalgia. Statistics suggest that upward of 75 percent of sufferers are able to fall asleep with no problems but awaken just as they reach the deep restorative stage of sleep and remain in a "twilight" state. Some fibromyalgia studies tie the constant sleep interruptions to abnormal brain activity bursts during the deepest stage of sleep. Pain can also make sleep more difficult and sleep deprivation worsens the pain. It becomes a vicious cycle. If these *sleep disturbances* can be reduced, however, so might the pain.

Depression

The majority of individuals with this disease probably also experience some level of the depression; it's a sense of helplessness that goes beyond just being "blue" for a day to being "down" for weeks and even months. Many feel incapable of pulling out of this funk. Depression with fibromyalgia isn't surprising, given the sleep deprivation, fatigue, pain, and stress. But too often depression is misdiagnosed as the underlying disease. Physicians aren't sure what really links the two conditions, but the majority of these individuals are Type A personalities for whom depression, prior to onset, was never an issue. They've gone from being active employees and/or parents to being too fatigued to live fully and have fun every day. Their weariness makes them depressed.

Cognitive Problems and Memory Loss

Cognition refers to our ability to think, analyze, and reason, and cognitive abilities are affected by fibromyalgia. Some people refer to this *cognitive impairment* as "fibro fog" or "brain fog." Mental malaise and memory lapses are common. Instead of performing routine work with vim and vigor, fibromyalgia sufferers usually slog through life as if they're wading through sludge. Sometimes, they can't muster the brainpower to do simple tasks, let alone pay attention, stay alert, or take on the day. Although studies suggest the cognitive difficulties and confusion experienced with fibromyalgia can be common with sleep deprivation, no one knows what really causes fibro fog.

Migraine Headaches

Known as vascular headaches because the blood vessels in your head become swollen and inflamed, migraines produce excruciating pain, usually on one side,

Symptoms of Fibromyalgia

- | | |
|---|---|
| Allergies | Major depression |
| Blurred vision | Migraines |
| Breathing problems | Morning fatigue |
| Cognitive impairment | Morning stiffness |
| Cold extremities | Multiple chemical sensitivity |
| Dizziness | Muscle twitches |
| Dry mouth | Night sweats |
| Dysmenorrhea (abnormal periods
in females) | Numbness and tingling in
hands or feet |
| Emotional changes (short
tempered) | Post-exertional malaise
(fatigue after exercise) |
| Fatigue | Rashes |
| Febrile feeling (feverish) | Restless legs |
| Generalized pain | Sensitivity to noise, smell, and
stress |
| Headaches | Sleep disturbances |
| Hearing disturbances | Stiffness |
| Heart palpitations | Swollen feeling in tissues |
| Interstitial cystitis (frequent
urination and burning) | Temporomandibular joint
syndrome (TMJ) |
| Irritable bowel syndrome | Tenderness |
| Itchy skin | |

Source: "Treating patients with chronic fatigue syndrome with antivirals to compensate immune dysfunction." Elizabeth Gunther, M.D., Daniel Dantini, M.D., and Pamela Carbiener, M.D.

over one eye. They generally last for hours but occasionally go on for days. Prior to the throbbing, some patients experience an aura, a warning period that includes strange smells or olfactory hallucinations and visual disturbances such as bright flashes. The pain can be accompanied by extreme sensitivity to light and loud noise along with fatigue, nausea, and, when most severe, vomiting. There are many possible causes for a migraine headache. In my

experience, however, delayed food allergies are a major trigger. (We'll discuss that connection in chapter 4.)

Irritable Bowel Syndrome

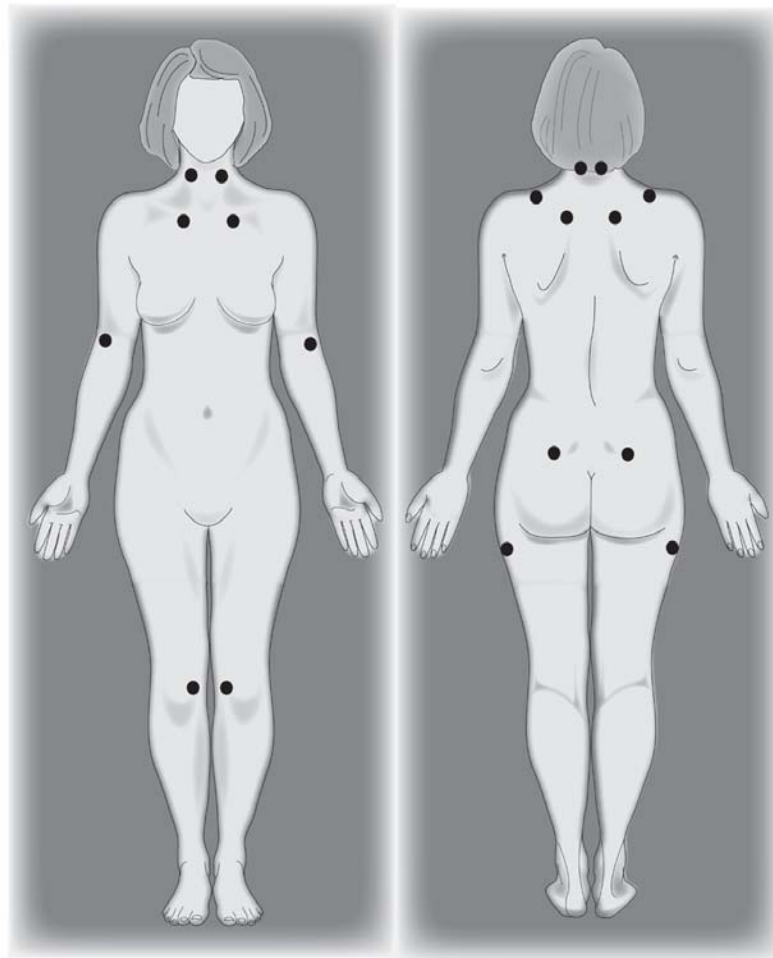
One of the most common health problems in the United States, irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), strikes millions of Americans — including fibromyalgia sufferers. The constellation of symptoms includes excessive gas or bloating, cramps, and alternating diarrhea and constipation. Sometimes an IBS attack can be so severe that sufferers can't leave home without planning their bathroom stops. Other times it's associated with *gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD)*, which results when excess stomach acid backs up into the esophagus, causing heartburn. The most common cause of IBS and *acid reflux* is sensitivity to food.

Trigger Points as a Key

It's the sweeping nature of fibromyalgia's symptoms that has perplexed physicians in diagnosing this disease. But here's where the American College of Rheumatology offers help. In defining the condition, it also created criteria to guide doctors in their diagnosis. To be considered as having fibromyalgia, your symptoms must include:

- Widespread pain of at least three months' duration (this eliminates viruses or other traumatic injury that might resolve themselves).
- Pain in all four quadrants of the body (right and left sides, above and below the waist).
- Pain in at least eleven of eighteen specified "tender" points, explicit sites of the body identified as particularly sensitive to certain pressure levels when probed gently by a physician. Although pain and

Trigger Points for Fibromyalgia Pain



Trigger points are found symmetrically on both sides of the body. These points include: base of neck in the back, top of the shoulders toward the back, on the breastbone, outer forearm just below the elbow, over the shoulder blade, top of the hip, outside of the hip, and on the fat pad over the knee.

tenderness can occur elsewhere, the American College of Rheumatology criteria identifies the most common nine points are: the back base of the skull, shoulders, chest, rib cage, elbows, lower back, buttocks, thighs, and knees. For a diagnosis of fibromyalgia, the discomfort must involve at least one point from each quadrant.

I like to refer to these tender points as trigger points because I believe they fit the definition of a tight hypersensitive band or bundle of skeletal muscle that's painful to the touch. If you press on these strategic spots long enough you'll feel a lumpy, hard nodule. Bear down for a while and you might even ease the discomfort, if only briefly. The American College of Rheumatology reserves the term "trigger point" for other chronic musculoskeletal pain, but I believe it's an accurate description of the sites in fibromyalgia, too.

Regardless, the idea is that there's no outward reason — no swelling or other physical findings — to explain the pain. Your X-rays look normal and your routine blood tests are negative. Yet the soreness is real, constant, and sometimes so severe that no medication will relieve it.

Progression of Fibromyalgia

Fibromyalgia starts subtly and progresses gradually. It usually takes months for you to realize that you're even sick. You may find yourself making all kinds of excuses for your changing mental and physical performance. You're getting older. You're too busy. You're working out too hard. You're going through menopause. You're stressed or not eating right. While you can rationalize the situation, sooner or later, you feel miserable more often than you feel well.

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At the same time, your disease is progressing. What begins as fatigue, followed by muscle and joint pain, develops into other symptoms. Just when you thought the malaise couldn't get worse, gastrointestinal problems, headaches, and other health issues begin. By the time I see patients, they're usually in bad shape both physically and mentally. As a result, they may be having trouble in their marriages or at work. People who do physical labor have so much muscle and joint pain that they can't function. People who have desk jobs may be so mentally fogged they can't remember details, focus on tasks, or be productive at work. Whatever their stations in life, fibromyalgia sufferers are looking for a diagnosis that makes sense and a treatment plan that works.

My ordeal with fibromyalgia started six years ago. I had flu-like symptoms with muscle and joint pain throughout my body. It had a dramatic effect on my life. I have always been athletic, but I was no longer able to ride a bike, exercise, or go to the gym. I had also been very physically active professionally in my veterinarian practice. Eventually, as I got worse, I sold my practice; I just couldn't make it through a day.

I went to several doctors, including one who specialized in immunology and communicable diseases, but I got no treatment that worked. I suffered for two years with no relief.

Les
Age 59

Enter the Four Viruses

Fibromyalgia is too often the diagnosis assigned whenever a physician can't find a specific cause. But my experience is that any one of four viruses can cause this ailment, and many patients have more than one of them. These viruses share certain characteristics, among which is that they lay in wait in normal functioning cells.

Epstein-Barr Virus

Frequently referred to as EBV, Epstein-Barr is one of the most common human viruses. An estimated nine out of ten people are infected by age fifty even though half of us won't develop symptoms. This virus is a respiratory tract invader, and in childhood it produces symptoms undistinguishable from other mild illnesses. But in adolescence and early adulthood, EBV causes infectious mononucleosis — known as the “kissing disease” because it can be transmitted via saliva. While the swollen glands and other symptoms usually resolve in several months, the virus remains, though rarely, if ever, produces mononucleosis again. It's linked, however, to two very rare cancers, *Burkitt's lymphoma* and *nasopharyngeal carcinoma*, and one not-so-rare cancer, *non-Hodgkin's lymphoma*, that's on the rise.

Cytomegalovirus

Although cytomegalovirus infects most adults at some point in their lives, most people don't develop symptoms. Cytomegalovirus can enter the body by many routes, including saliva, sexual contact, and the moist droplets of coughs and sneezes. But it can also cross the placenta, seriously harming a fetus if the mother is infected during pregnancy. People with weakened immune systems, such as *HIV* or *AIDS* patients, are at highest risk for severe, even

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life-threatening, episodes. In healthy individuals, however, the symptoms resemble those of mononucleosis, largely resolving on their own, even as the virus remains in the cells.

Herpesvirus 6

Discovered in 1986 but mostly likely around for centuries, herpesvirus 6 causes a common childhood illness known as *roseola infantum*. Spread by close contact, roseola is characterized by the rapid onset of high fever, irritability, and swollen lymph nodes. Seizures, or febrile convulsions, may develop as body temperature rises, but they're rarely serious in the long term. After several days, the fever vanishes and a pink spotted rash appears on the face and trunk; it disappears in another four days. While one attack of roseola provides lifelong immunity, some researchers have linked herpesvirus 6 to *multiple sclerosis*.

Parvovirus

Primarily a childhood virus, *human parvovirus B19* is transmitted through cough and sneeze droplets. It causes *fifth disease*, so named because it shares features with four once-common ailments — measles, rubella, scarlet fever, and Dukes' disease. Fifth's dominant characteristic is a rosy face coloration, known as "slapped-cheek" rash because it resembles marks from a slap. The inflammation appears following other cold-like symptoms. By the time it spreads to the arms, trunk, thighs, and buttocks, the infection is no longer contagious, but the symptoms can linger for weeks. Although parvovirus is mild in children, it can cause severe joint inflammation in adults.

What Are Viruses?

The four viruses discussed previously — Epstein-Barr, cytomegalovirus, herpesvirus 6, and parvovirus — and other viruses are part of a larger family of tiny substances called microbes. Too minuscule to see with the naked eye, these microscopic organisms live abundantly on earth, permeating every space, including the human body. Although we need some microbes to live healthy lives, others pose a real threat to our existence.

Scientists have understood since the 1800s that microbes cause infectious disease. They've since found links to many chronic conditions. Mounting evidence, for instance, ties microorganisms to autism, some cancers, chronic lung and coronary artery disease, diabetes, multiple sclerosis, and, I believe, fibromyalgia. Although we often refer to microbes generally as “bugs” or “germs,” most of them fall into one of four very specific groups: bacteria, fungi, protozoa — and viruses.

How Viruses Work

Viruses are so tiny that millions of them can inhabit one human cell. They consist of little more than *DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid)* or *RNA (ribonucleic acid)*, encased in a protein shell, sometimes surrounded by another outer envelope. You may remember from biology that DNA is the “twisted ladder” molecular structure that gives cells their characteristics. It contains genetic instructions for building and maintaining every living cell. RNA acts as a messenger, carrying those orders.

Viruses are odd microbes in that they can't do anything on their own. They don't fit the definition of a living organism because they can't metabolize nutrients, produce wastes, or move independently. The only way a virus can reproduce, which is its sole purpose, is to attach itself to

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another living cell. Once inside, it takes over the host to make millions of copies of itself. This process may begin immediately or much later. But the end result is that new viruses are released to infect other cells. When this occurs, we get sick.

Viruses are skilled invaders, but they're also very selective in how they enter the body and what they target. They may enter by being inhaled, swallowed, or through skin-to-skin contact. Each virus causes a specific type of disease or set of symptoms. Many are localized; that is, they restrict themselves to specific cells, organs, and tissues. Cold viruses, for instance, affect only the respiratory tract. Others, like the four viruses I've linked to fibromyalgia, disseminate throughout the body via the bloodstream. Because the cells they tend to favor are everywhere in the body, the symptoms they produce are generalized rather than localized.

Viruses are also grouped into many classifications, based on physical and biochemical similarities. Take the herpesvirus family, for instance. Behind only the flu and cold viruses, it's among the top viral sources of disease. While there are eight known strains, you're probably most familiar with these:

- *herpes simplex 1 (HSV-1)*, which causes fever blisters and cold sores
- *herpes simplex 2 (HSV-2)*, which causes genital herpes
- *herpes varicella zoster virus (VZV)*, which is the root of chicken pox and shingles

Three of the four viruses implicated in fibromyalgia are also part of the herpes family. Epstein-Barr and cytomegalovirus are from the side of this virus group that generates infectious mononucleosis-type symptoms.

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Herpesvirus 6 is from the branch known for causing childhood roseola infantum. Although parvovirus, the fourth fibromyalgia-related virus, has nothing to do with the herpes clan, it shares a common thread with the other three in that they're all DNA viruses.

DNA, Latent, and Chronic Viruses

DNA viruses have been known for years to live “silently” in the body. They sometimes “sleep” inside the nucleus of the cell for months, even years, before causing an initial episode or a follow-up event. Although these “stealth” or “latent” germs are common instigators in childhood illnesses, they can reappear later in life in a state that is different and more aggressive. For instance, while most children recover completely from chicken pox, the underlying varicella zoster virus can sleep in the sensory nerves of the head, neck, and trunk for years. It can wake up later as herpes zoster, or shingles, a cluster of painful blisters that follows a pattern along the implicated spinal nerves.

A similar situation occurs in individuals with Epstein-Barr, cytomegalovirus, herpesvirus 6, and parvovirus. The viruses don't totally clear out of the body after the initial episode; they leave a residual infection to reactivate when the immune system is depressed from stress or other reasons. At that time, they awaken, multiply, and cause symptoms all over again. Only this time, the pain may be worse and further dispersed.

Moreover, when a virus persists, activating time after time, it becomes a chronic problem. The body can't seem to shake or suppress the symptoms so you're fighting it again and again. The flu, for example, is typically an *acute*, or short-lived, respiratory tract infection. The symptoms start quickly but you recover in a week or two. Yet if your immune system can't adequately deal with the initial germs,

it can be a continual problem. Many people carry chronic viruses that can lead to diseases like fibromyalgia. But in those individuals who experience the disease, the immune system isn't capable of turning off the replication once it begins, making way for more-damaging, intense symptoms. In order for you to heal, we need to deal with this devastating problem. But first, a quick look at an important link.

How Viruses and the Immune System Create Fibromyalgia

In the previous paragraphs, I laid the groundwork for why I think Epstein-Barr, cytomegalovirus, herpesvirus 6, and parvovirus cause fibromyalgia: As DNA viruses, they're capable of lying dormant in the body for years before coming back and causing the symptoms we see in fibromyalgia. The extent to which any one of these viruses replicates after reactivating depends on the effectiveness of our natural defenses to suppress or eliminate that process.

Under normal circumstances, the immune system, a meticulous network of special cells, tissues, and organs, deals very effectively with any attacking virus or bacteria. The immune system keeps our internal environment in balance, functioning with no glitches. In keeping that stability, the immune system turns many mechanisms on and off to fight invaders. More specifically, when a virus enters the body, the system recognizes it as a foreign invader, or antigen, and fights it with an immune response. As part of this response, the body sends white blood cells to seek and destroy the invading substance.

Without our immune system, we'd be sick constantly, reacting to everything we eat and breathe. But even your immune system can let you down on occasion. There are many reasons it doesn't behave optimally or even

appropriately. When you've undergone an organ transplant, for instance, it can't protect you with the same ferocity as normal because the drugs you're taking to prevent rejection also suppress your immunity, making you prone to infection. When you have an autoimmune disorder, your system misidentifies the body's proteins as invaders and then proceeds to produce antibodies that attack the tissues and cells.

In people prone to fibromyalgia, the immune system, for reasons yet unclear, fails to prevent latent viruses from rising up and multiplying again. Instead, it becomes over-stimulated in its subsequent responses. That is, when a chronic virus doesn't clear the body initially, the system accelerates its reply the next time around. This hyper- or over- reaction magnifies old symptoms and introduces new ones, such as the intense pain and prolonged fatigue we see with fibromyalgia. It also can result in other damaging ailments such as migraine headaches and irritable bowel syndrome, common spin-off symptoms of yet another phenomenon — delayed food allergies — involved with this disease.

Any time the immune system can't control or eliminate an illness, overstimulation can occur. In fibromyalgia, I believe the four viruses I've named are the likely triggers.

Other Possible Causes of Fibromyalgia

There are many differing opinions about the cause or causes of fibromyalgia. Do I think this disease could have origins other than viral infections? Yes, there's a good chance of it. Scientists have suggested a number of theories that could indeed come into play. The frustrating task in categorizing any potential causes, however, is that in reality, some of them may be the effects, rather than the roots, of the syndrome. Science hasn't produced many conclusive

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answers in this regard. In fact, most current research is centered on the effects or symptoms of fibromyalgia, not the underlying causes. But that hasn't deterred investigators from looking at a range of topics, from genetics and hormones to injury, trauma, and stress.

Genetics

Although some studies have documented fibromyalgia in certain families, scientists have yet to identify genetic markers, which are gene changes that put individuals at increased risk for disease. Although the four viruses we've identified are contagious, I believe a genetic predisposition for the body's inability to handle viruses well is a very important part of this disease. It's also possible that environmental factors play a role. It is also feasible that some physical, emotional, or environmental force triggers a person's genetic predisposition into a full-blown disease. Whatever the case, there are many areas yet to be explored regarding genetics' influence on fibromyalgia.

Chemical Imbalances

Scientists are focusing their research on various aspects of the central nervous system — the brain and spinal cord network that coordinates body activities. One popular theory is that fibromyalgia pain is caused by an imbalance in hormones, chemicals that regulate neurological and other activities in the body. Fibromyalgia patients, for instance, appear to abnormally process *neural hormones* and *neurotransmitters*, the carriers that transport electrical signals between the nervous system and other cells. There's also interest as to why fibromyalgia sufferers have too much of *substance P*, the hormone that sends out pain messages, and too little of serotonin, the hormone that “turns down the

volume” once these pain messages are received by the brain.

On another hormone front, scientists are also examining cortisol, an adrenal gland secretion that provides immunologic protection by maintaining blood pressure, blood sugar, and other biological functions. Too much cortisol production is thought to suppress immune activity while too little puts the system into overdrive. Some studies suggest that fibromyalgia sufferers have *low cortisol levels* during the day, which leads to fatigue, and conversely, too much at night, which causes insomnia.

Injury and Trauma

Many researchers believe that an injury, particularly to the neck and spine, can trigger fibromyalgia. Whether stemming from a car crash, a work accident, or a major fall, the trauma impacts the central nervous system in such a way that it causes symptoms. There’s also evidence that repetitive tasks, like typing or hammering, cause flare-ups. In fact, fibromyalgia tends to find its way to areas of the body recently injured or stressed. For example, I used my hands to break my fall while skiing. The soreness in my wrist should have disappeared in a week, but it lasted more than a month. In any case, research continues into the role of other physical or emotional stresses in triggering this disease.

The above discussion of possible causes of fibromyalgia provides just a small glimpse at the many different directions researchers are taking in studying this disease. In the end, a combination of factors may be at work. Some of my patients associate their early symptoms of fibromyalgia with surgery, or a car accident, or even an emotional trauma, such as abuse. For them, certain events triggered the dormant virus to wake up and become active.

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Whatever the cause, or causes, they are all desperate for relief.

A Final Word

Fibromyalgia remains, for both physicians and their patients, a mysterious and often misunderstood disease with frustrating symptoms and associated conditions. But by focusing on viruses as a potential cause for this ailment, I believe we can offer sufferers real solutions. In the next chapter we'll take a close look at the four-step diagnostic process I've developed for my patients. It can help pinpoint the source of your symptoms and put you on the road to better health.