

Health Notes

Fibromyalgia

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It is estimated that between three and six million Americans suffer from fibromyalgia. Chronic, sometime debilitating, widespread musculoskeletal pain with fatigue characterize this condition. Women tend to suffer from this significantly more often than men do.

Fibromyalgia is considered a syndrome not a disease. This differentiation is very important in the diagnosis and treatment of fibromyalgia.

A disease is a pathological entity, meaning it causes the development of abnormal conditions as well as structural and functional changes. Usually these changes result in tissue degeneration. A disease is an illness or sickness into itself with characteristic symptoms that are unique.

A syndrome is a combination of many signs and symptoms associated with any unhealthy process. When grouped together, these signs and symptoms look and act like a disease. A syndrome is often just as painful and disabling as a disease.

The major signs and symptoms that factor into the diagnosis of fibromyalgia are, subjective aching and stiffness for more than three months, tenderness of at least 11 of the designated key points of the body and normal findings of specific blood tests and x-rays.

Some, but not all, of the following minor signs and symptoms must also be present: chronic fatigue, sleep disorders, change in symptoms with anxiety/stress and activity, change in symptoms with weather, headaches, irritable bowel syndrome, and swelling. It is interesting that the so-called "minor" symptoms are usually what forces people to seek care.

Treatment of the Fibromyalgia Syndrome must first start with counseling and education. The most important step a fibromyalgia sufferer can take is to avoid a sedentary lifestyle. They must begin a daily, gentle and aerobic exercise program. Even if they can only start with a few minutes at a time, exercise is crucial in self-management of this syndrome.

Detecting and eliminating sleep disorders is critical. A sound night's sleep allows you to reach the deep sleep cycles where the body's own natural pain regulating substances are released.

Dietary changes such as eliminating caffeine, alcohol, MSG, processed foods, sugar, and carbonated beverages is advised. Nutritional supplementation

along with the use of natural anti-inflammatories and digestive aids also help many sufferers of fibromyalgia.

The medical profession utilizes a variety of prescriptive drugs to treat this syndrome. Anti-inflammatories, sleep aids, antidepressants and muscle relaxers are some of the types of medications prescribed.

Chiropractors utilize spinal manipulation to remove interference within the nervous system. Many of us also utilize techniques designed to relieve painful muscles as well as nutritional counseling and therapeutic exercise.

Each patient responds differently to care. In some cases multidisciplinary approaches must be initiated. If you suffer from fibromyalgia, or think you do, ask your doctor about the many available treatment alternatives. A wide variety of treatment protocols by many different health care practitioners are available.

HIPPA and Businesses

If you have visited a doctor's office in the past 6 months, it is likely that you have been introduced to HIPPA. HIPPA is the abbreviation for the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act.

HIPPA is a privacy law. Its purpose is to protect personal health information. Not only does this apply to health care providers but also to employers; substantial fines and even jail time can be the penalty for failing to comply with HIPPA.

You may consider these steps to protect yourself and your business. First, restrict the number of people who have access to any health-related information. Second, restrict the amount of personal health information that comes into your company. Request that your insurance company only provides you with summary health information. Third, secure any personal health information in a "protected area." A protected area is just one of the ambiguous phrases contained in the volumes of HIPPA. Also use a dedicated fax machine to further protect this information. Finally, you must inform your workers of how HIPPA works. Stress to those employees who have access to personal health information, how important it is to protect this information and to keep it quiet.

Do not take this lightly. April 14, 2004 is when these regulations are in effect. Questions? The government has a HIPPA site for small companies: www.hhs.gov/ocr/hippa/smallbusiness.html.

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