Understanding Fibromyalgia Headaches
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The Link Between Fibromyalgia and Migraines

Fibromyalgia is often blamed for mild, everyday discomforts, but it may also be tied to a more monumental health problem. Studies have shown that as many as 75 percent of fibro patients also suffer from migraine headaches or myofascial headaches, which suggests the connection is more than coincidental.

Unfortunately, it’s difficult to find a single common cause, so you’ll need to focus your efforts on understanding the similarities at a physiological level, and how best to treat the two conditions simultaneously.

Understanding the Fibro-Headache Connection

One of the leading explanations for migraines and other headaches in fibro patients is straightforward; one pain condition lowers your threshold for other painful conditions. When your nerves and pain receptors are already sensitized (as they are with fibromyalgia), you are prone to feeling the inflammation of arteries on the surface of the brain (a migraine headache) more acutely.

There are a few physical factors that may contribute to both types of pain, such as:

- **Substance P.** Studies have shown that fibromyalgia patients have a higher level of this particular neuropeptide, which plays a role in how pain is transmitted to the brain. Others studies suggest it may have a role in migraine pain, too.
- **Serotonin levels.** This chemical is responsible for mood regulation can dull pain, and so it’s no surprise many fibro and migraine patients have low serotonin levels.
- **Sensory sensitivity.** The chronic pain of fibromyalgia and the acute pain of migraine headaches are often sparked by sudden bursts or moments of sensory overload, and sufferers of both conditions tend to perceive pain more thoroughly.
- **Depression.** A large percentage of fibromyalgia and migraine sufferers have battled depression, and received medical treatment for the condition.

Even if there are similarities in the way the body reacts during a migraine and a fibro flare, doctors are reluctant to draw conclusions on the physiological connection between these somatic illnesses. After all, they are two separate conditions and must be treated as such, especially since some popular treatments for fibromyalgia, like exercise, are not an option for someone suffering from a throbbing headache.

Treating Different Sources of Pain and Discomfort

Dealing with two painful conditions at once is challenging, and will probably require a few different approaches. Remember that everyone will respond differently to various treatments, and it may take some time to find the right formula for your fibro-migraine treatment.
Quick relief is a high priority for fibro and migraine sufferers, so you’ll need medications that are very strong and fast acting, such as:

- Pain-relieving narcotics (Vicodin, Percocet)
- Muscle relaxants (Tizanidine)
- NSAIDs (Ibuprofen, aspirin, naproxen)

While pain relief is important, prevention is your safest bet for a more comfortable life. These treatments and techniques can keep headaches at bay so you can focus on your fibromyalgia:

- Beta blockers (Inderol, Toprol)
- Calcium channel blockers (Cardizem)
- Tricyclic anti-depressants (Amitriptyline, Nortriptyline)

Anti-depressants are particularly promising, since they not only help to prevent migraines, but they’ve been proven to relieve the pain, fatigue and sleep problems associated with fibromyalgia. You may have to try a few different drugs before you find one that works well for your range of symptoms, but fortunately there are many options available.

Along with medication, those who suffer from more than one chronic pain condition often find relief with some complementary therapy. Biofeedback, physical therapy, acupuncture and adjustments to your diet are all solid options for a holistic treatment plan.