

The Effects of Fibromyalgia on Relationships

The sum effect of all of the problems of Fibromyalgia can leave these sick individuals almost intolerable to live or work with. Yet they are intolerable to themselves also, and need lots of understanding, love, and support. They will probably need it more than at any other time in their lives, because they will probably never be in such a difficult situation again. Many of them feel that even death can seem preferable to living with Fibromyalgia.

Marriage is especially difficult. The spouse is afraid, can't be touched because of skin sensitivity, is depressed, in pain, and very tired. He or she may yell, be unreasonable, and in more severe cases lose the ability to communicate on a rational basis. This is because the nervous system is on overload and these people can't function as normal individuals no matter how hard they try. In milder cases of FMS your spouse or co-worker may just appear mean, and may not even have the satisfaction of a correct diagnosis. But these symptoms usually resolve early in treatment.

To put this in perspective, imagine having pain impulses from all over the body being sent to the brain, much as when a heroin addict is withdrawing from heroin. (This may vary from person to person in intensity.) In addition to this, the sympathetic nervous system is being stimulated constantly, causing one to feel as we might when walking into a dark home, thinking we're alone, and someone grabs us from behind. This sensation often continues night and day without relief in the Fibromyalgia patient.

This constant stimulation of the sympathetic nervous system also causes a shutdown of the intestinal system, which in turn causes irritable bowel syndrome. The adrenal glands, constantly producing adrenaline, become damaged and quit functioning properly. The emotional centers become affected, causing depression ranging from mild to overwhelming. Many patients describe feeling waves of depression.

Moreover, the stimulation to the nerve roots sends signals to the muscles to contract, causing constant muscle spasms. These can be located in the neck and shoulders, the low back, and sometimes the entire body all at once. Spastic-type paralysis can occur, especially upon arising, sometimes causing inability to walk due to pain in the hips and loss of function in the legs.

Sexual relations are often too painful or unfulfilling; desire may be decreased or non-existent. This is a very ill person. How much fun are you when you have a bad case of the flu? We have seen that FMS is much worse than that, and we haven't even mentioned the effects of drug medication. Those who are close to these sufferers will want to be sensitive to their condition and not expect the impossible of them.

All of these factors combine to place stress on relationships at home, in the workplace, and in all of the social situations. It requires lots of understanding and patience on both sides.