

Jeanne's Experience with Fibromyalgia

Most of my life I have dealt with pain in some area of my body. Symptoms included soft tissue injuries, structural imbalances, insomnia, chronic illness, general fatigue and depression.

In 1996 some of my symptoms were given the label of FMS. The diagnosis itself was not especially comforting, as there is no known cure for FMS; however, knowing that there were others who had this condition, and that the medical community recognized it, was promising. I wasn't crazy!

An introduction to Yoga over twenty years ago taught me that breathing into sensations can create detachment from (and an acceptance of) symptoms. Gained awareness of daily movements and use of ergonomics in the workplace helped the pain subside. A new attitude toward life led to the desire of sharing this ancient tradition with others. It wasn't just the physical movement of the asanas — meditation, visualization, pranayama, and deep relaxation brought a greater sense of knowing my true self. Yoga has been one of the most effective tools for healing. However, it is not a panacea and should be used as an adjunct with other treatment approaches.

I became a certified teacher through Integrative Yoga Therapy in 1998.

Regular study with teachers who focus on therapeutic applications of Yoga and healing of the whole continue to guide me. After initial training with teachers of Iyengar and other styles of Yoga, I discovered the tradition of T.K.V. Desikachar (sometimes referred to as Viniyoga in the United States). Appropriate sequencing and adaptations of poses to meet individual needs, conscious linking of breath and movement, together with specific pranayama practices, sound, and deep relaxation, has brought profound levels of healing to me, and my students as well.

Two qualities must be present in asana practice: stability and alertness (sthira) and comfort (sukha). (See, Yoga Sutra II.46.) Students should not push muscles to point of exertion. When one is unable to perform asana repetitions, suggest mentally visualizing the performance of the movement. Holding poses for too long can cause symptom flare-ups as contracting a muscle for any period of time can activate trigger points. Movement should not be excessive although immobility is another fairly common cause of trigger point flare-ups. Pauses between repetitions allow muscles to relax. Asana practice should always end with a rest in savasana or another restorative posture.

Everyday posture and body mechanics are especially important. How one stands, lifts, sits, walks, and moves can play a big role in sustaining daily energy. If the body is out of balance, strain can result. Avoid sitting in one position for lengthy periods of time as muscle contraction can occur. The body needs to move. Check your body's alignment often throughout the day.

Integrative Restoration (iRest®) - Yoga Nidra practice, a guided meditation protocol, has been found to be effective for healing of many chronic conditions. Resting deeply without falling asleep restores the mind and body. Integrating regular periods of rest into each day, even when you feel well, may prevent flare-ups.

Suggested pranayama techniques include: langhana (lengthening the exhalation) for cleansing the body, sitali (the cooling breath) to promote healing of autoimmune deficiencies such as FMS, and nadi sodhana pranayama, (alternate nasal breathing) to bring balance to bodily systems. Each individual is different and has unique needs; therefore, choosing pranayama techniques to meet those needs is important.

Meditation has been proven to help with chronic pain and depression. By stopping thoughts momentarily, the mind and body experience a rejuvenating break. Sleep patterns and drug dependency may improve as well.

How Yoga Supports Fibromyalgia

- Helps maintain energy and strength
- Can be done anywhere without special equipment
- Relaxes tight, sore muscles
- Stimulates circulation and hormonal systems
- Oxygenates body
- Flushes out toxins and impurities
- Counteracts fatigue and lethargy
- Reduces stress reaction
- Activates parasympathetic nervous system
- Lifts depression
- Reduces anxiety and inertia
- Gives mind and body reprieve
- Clears scattered mind
- Improves sleeping patterns

For teachers who struggle with FMS, reducing or eliminating demonstration of poses may help conserve energy needed for healing. This is a beautiful way to practice ahimsa toward self. Refraining from demonstrating can also encourage students to move inward and experience the poses more fully in their own bodies.

Working with a teacher who has therapeutic training and experience is essential. Begin with an extra gentle practice. Remember the line often quoted by seasoned teachers, "If you can breathe, you can do Yoga." With conscious breathing and simple movements a calming peace can replace fatigue and frustration. Take it easy and listen to your inner wisdom.

Jeanne Dillion has been the Director of Yoga for Wellness and Workplace Wellness (an office ergonomics and wellness consulting business) since 1998. She is certified through Integrative Yoga Therapy and a Registered Yoga Teacher with the distinguished level of E-RYT 500. Jeanne is also a Certified iRest® Teacher. She has been practicing Yoga since 1990, and has attended trainings with T.K.V. Desikachar, Jon Kabat-Zinn, and many other renowned yoga masters.

REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READING

Bouanchaud, B: *The Essence of Yoga, Reflections on the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, Portland, OR: Rudra Press, 1997.

Davis, M, Eshelman, ER, McKay, M: *The Relaxation & Stress Reduction Workbook*, Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications: 1995.

Desikachar, TKV: *The Heart of Yoga*, Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 1995.

Desikachar, TKV: *The Viniyoga of Yoga*, Chennai, India: Quadra Press Limited, 2001.

Feuerstein, G: *The Yoga Perspective on Pain, Mental Health, and Euthanasia*, Pain and Pain Management, pp. 3-5.

Kabat-Zinn, J: *Full Catastrophe Living* New York, Delta; 1990.

Kraftsow, G: *Yoga for Wellness*, Arkana: Penguin Group, 1999.

Lasater, J: Relax and Renew: Restful Yoga for Stressful Times, Berkeley, CA: Rodmell Press: 1995.

Miller, R: The Journal of the International Association of Yoga Therapists, The Psychophysiology of Respiration. 1991.

Miller, R: Experiencing Nonduality with Richard C. Miller, Ph.D., www.nondual.com

LePage, J: Integrative Yoga Therapy Training Manual. Aptos CA, Printsmith, 1994.

Starlanyl, Devin, Copeland, ME, Fibromyalgia & Chronic Myofascial Pain Syndrome A Survival Manual, Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications, Inc.: 1996.

Salt, WB, Season, EH: Fibromyalgia and the Mind Body Spirit Connection 7 Steps for Living a Healthy Life with Widespread Muscular Pain and Fatigue, Columbus, OH: Parkview Publishing: 2000.