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**Fibromyalgia** (FM) is a very common musculoskeletal disorder characterized by chronic widespread body pain that leads to reduced physical function. <sup>1</sup>Pharmacologic interventions have been the primary approach to treatment. <sup>2,3</sup>However they are effective on about one third of the time. Due to advancements since this research was published, one could logically expect the efficacy to be much greater today. <sup>2</sup>Nevertheless, a recent evaluation of the literature (still) suggests that optimal therapy would combine pharmacologic treatment with exercise and behavioral interventions. <sup>4</sup>While it is widely accepted that exercise is one of many important components of a comprehensive treatment plan, in the long term, people who exercise have less negative impact of

FM in their lives. <sup>5</sup>Exercise recommendations for persons with FM are currently evolving. Increasingly, studies examining the effects of exercise programs on persons with FM are revealing the unique requirements of this population. <sup>4</sup>Significantly painful myofascial trigger (tender) points that are restricting the ability to exercise should be treated. Other considerations that may limit exercise programs include arthritis, cardiac problems, prior injuries, blood pressure, eccentric muscle work, psychological factors, fatigue, and effects from concurrent medications. Patients with these and other exercise restrictions may benefit from massage therapy. <sup>6</sup>One researcher who has conducted extensive research on the effects of massage on fibromyalgia and chronic fatigue pain is Tiffany Field, Ph.D., director of the Touch Research Institute at University of Miami School of Medicine. Field, who also is a professor of Pediatrics and Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences, says she is observing a growing number of people with FM who use massage. In one study, Field and her colleagues randomly assigned the participants with FM to receive one of three types of therapy for 30-minute treatment sessions twice a week for five weeks: massage therapy; transcutaneous electrical stimulation; or transcutaneous electrical stimulation without current. “We were surprised by the results,” Field says: The subjects who received massage showed lower levels of anxiety, depression and cortisol, a hormone that is activated under stress. A device for quantifying pain showed that the massage subjects also experienced decreased pain sensitivity. Field speculates that massage helps people with FM because it boosts immunological and neuroendocrine functions and increases serotonin levels. “Several benefits were found in our study on massaging those with FM, including better sleep, lower levels of substance P that causes pain, and less frequent pain,” says Field, who has been studying pain syndromes for more than ten years. Field and her colleagues conducted another study whose results highlight the clinical significance of using massage therapy as a complementary treatment. “Compared with the FM group that practiced relaxation techniques, the group who received massage experienced decreased depression; improved sleep; decreased pain, fatigue and stiffness; improved health assessments by physicians; fewer tender points; and a reduced level of substance P.”

**Please consider asking your doctor for a referral to our practice if you are bothered by pain, suffer from an injury, or are planning a surgery. You can print a referral form (Rx form) from the home page of this website.**

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3. Wolfe F, et al. Health status and disease severity in fibromyalgia. *Arthritis and Rheumatism*. 1997;40:1571-1579
4. Jones KD, Clark SR, *Rheumatic Disease Clinics of North America* 28 (2002) 419-436