

Fibromyalgia and the Far Infrared Sauna

By Pertti Olavi Jalasjaa

Fibromyalgia has been called the “aching-all-over disease,” but that epithet falls short of conveying the true wretchedness of the debilitating illness. An often agonizing muscle disorder in which the thin film or tissue holding muscle together becomes thickened or tightened, fibromyalgia is characterized by widespread musculoskeletal aches, pains and stiffness, soft tissue tenderness, mild to incapacitating fatigue, and disturbed sleep.

The pain of fibromyalgia is typically felt in the neck, back, shoulders and hands, but it is not exclusive to those areas. Based on criteria set in 1990 by the American College of Rheumatology (ACR), a diagnosis of fibromyalgia requires a patient to have experienced widespread pain for a minimum of three months in 11 of 18 tender muscle sites. Among those 18 sites are the hips, knees and rib cage.

Other symptoms of fibromyalgia include allergies, anxiety, carpal tunnel syndrome, depression, dizziness, headaches, irritable bowel symptoms, numbness, and tender skin. The ACR estimates that fibromyalgia affects as many as 6 million Americans. Most sufferers of fibromyalgia are women of childbearing age, but it has also been known to strike men, children and the elderly.

As for what causes fibromyalgia, many theories exist. *The Alternative Medicine Guide to Chronic Fatigue, Fibromyalgia and Environmental Illness* states that “post-traumatic fibromyalgia is believed to develop after a fall, whiplash or back strain, whereas primary fibromyalgia has an uncertain origin.” However, in her book *Detoxify or Die*, Dr. Sherry A. Rogers suggests pesticides, silicone from breast implants, mercury poisoning, and the “leakage of putrid intestinal metabolic products into body tissues” as possible causes of fibromyalgia.

Although theorists may not concur on the causes of fibromyalgia, there is some consensus among doctors that patients with fibromyalgia can benefit from a combination of mild exercise, heat therapy, and relaxation, all of which can be achieved by using a far infrared sauna.

In her book *The Holistic Handbook of Sauna Therapy*, Dr. Nenah Sylver extols the sauna for its ability to increase cardiovascular activity and white blood cell, enzyme, and norepinephrine, beta-endorphin and possibly thyroxin production. As they, in turn, help to enhance circulation, increase waste removal and nutrient absorption, raise metabolism, and promote the elimination of toxins, foreign proteins and microbes, Dr. Sylver deems the aforementioned benefits of proper sauna use crucial in helping people with fibromyalgia. She notes “there are actually very few health problems that cannot be helped (or would become worse) with sauna therapy” but advises patients nevertheless to consult with their health providers before beginning sauna therapy.

Dr. Rogers and other health professionals insist that the far infrared sauna, radiant heat sauna or heat therapy room is of greater benefit to fibromyalgia sufferers than the traditional hot Finnish sauna because of a fundamental difference between the two styles of sauna. Rogers calls the far

infrared sauna “infinitely more tolerable,” particularly for people with fibromyalgia, chronic fatigue syndrome or multiple sclerosis, because it can function effectively at a much lower temperature than a conventional Finnish sauna.

“I’m convinced that the far infrared sauna is something that everyone should do to restore health,” declares Dr. Rogers. “It can do what no medication can do – reverse disease.”