

## April 2000's Advocate:

### [Interleukin 10 Found to Reduce Fibrosis in Non-Responders](#)

A University of Florida study resulted in decreased liver inflammation in 19 of 22 patients. Fibrosis decreased in 14 of 22 patients.

### [Taking a Alternative Look At Alternative Medicine](#)

David Lang believes that if you want to find out the truth about alternative treatments, you should follow the science.

### [Healthwise: What You Should Know About Fibromyalgia](#)

Fibromyalgia affects two to six percent of the U.S. population and its symptoms, muscle pain and fatigue, are often the same as the side effects of Interferon therapy.

### [Treatment Advocate: Is Dry Mouth Driving You Crazy?](#)

Dry mouth, or "xerostomia" is a common symptom of interferon treatment and is often exacerbated by anti-depressants. Here's some tips for minimizing the discomfort.

### [Co-Infection Alert](#)

HIV-Infected Patients With Liver Disease Require Lower Dose of Amprenavir. [Click here for more information.](#)

### [New Hep C Helpline for Northern California Residents](#)

## **Interleukin 10 Found to Reduce Fibrosis in Non-Responders**

An study published in the April issue of the medical journal Gastroenterology has found that interleukin 10 treatment can reduce fibrosis in patients with Hepatitis C who are interferon nonresponders.

The study, from the University of Florida College of Medicine found that interleukin-10 (IL-10) therapy is safe and well tolerated in patients with chronic hepatitis C. While it has no antiviral activity, IL-10, the study found, normalizes serum ALT levels, improves liver histology and reduces liver fibrosis in a large proportion of patients receiving treatment. The doctors conducting the study believe that IL-10 may have therapeutic potential in patients with chronic hepatitis C who do not respond to interferon-based therapy.

Interleukin 10 is a cytokine that helps decrease liver inflammation and inhibits fibrosis. The aim of this study was to determine the effect of IL-10 on hepatic injury in patients with chronic hep C.

Twenty-four patients with chronic hepatitis C who had not previously responded to interferon-based therapy were enrolled in a randomized, double-blinded 2-dose trial in which they received either 4 or 8 mug/kg IL-10 subcutaneously daily for 90 days. Liver biopsies were performed before and at the end of therapy.

IL-10 treatment was well tolerated with 22 patients completing the study. Serum ALT levels normalized in 19 of 22 patients by the end of therapy and were sustained in 5 of 22. Liver inflammation decreased in 19 of 22 patients. Fibrosis decreased in 14 of 22 patients. There was no change in serum HCV RNA levels. IL-10 therapy was associated with changes in serological markers, suggesting a reduction of immune response and fibrogenesis.

## An Alternative Look At Alternative Medicine

By David Lang

David Lang had a liver transplant in February, 1996. He is chairman of the Education Committee for the Hepatitis Education Project and a past vice-president. He is married, no children, two cars, three cats, a rowboat and a three bedroom house in the suburbs of South Seattle. His hobbies are reading, computers, trout fishing and collecting WWII vintage rifles (which he repairs and restores and shoots at his local rod and gun club rifle range). He's been married to his wife, Alice, for 10 years.

NBC News reported that in 1998, \$300 billion were spent on alternative health care in the USA. But what exactly is Alternative Medicine? By definition, it is an alternative to science-based medicine and encompasses so many protocols, procedures, belief systems, practices, herbal treatments and nutritional supplements that it's mind boggling.

Why are people attracted to Alternative Medicine?

Many have a fear of science-based medicine. A visit to the doctor's office always carries the fear of needles and surgery and powerful chemical drug treatments. Others are frustrated with doctors who schedule five minutes for every patient and do not take time to listen or to explain medical terms and procedures. Hospitals and doctor's offices are often frightening places and people may develop neuroses if every time they go to a doctor for treatment, that treatment involves pain. If you are a dog owner you know that your dog will get highly agitated when you drive past the vet's office or a cat owner will know what happens when the cat carrier comes out of the closet. After all the surgeries and procedures I have endured, I start shaking and my mouth gets dry and my blood pressure skyrockets when I walk into a doctor's office or a hospital. Another reason people find alternative medicine so attractive is because the practitioner, whether a chiropractor or herbalist or any other practitioner of alt med, is soothing and takes time with each patient and listens to their fears and reassures them that there is a "natural" and painless treatment, unlike a medical doctor. Friends, relatives and co-workers swiftly spread the testimonial message of their satisfactory care.

Why does it seem to work so well?

Most medical conditions, around 80 percent, eventually go away on their own, whether it is a case of the flu or a strained back. Alternative medicines seem to work because we get better when we use herbs or supplements or acupuncture. But without a comparative scientific study, how do we know if it works or not? Unfortunately, critical thinking is a skill taught in very few schools in this country. As Carl Sagan put it The Fine Art of Baloney Detection is sorely lacking in the U.S. No matter how attractive a product or procedure may seem, we need to demand scientific studies.

How do we know what medicine or treatment is real and what is wishful thinking or just fraud?

Here are some triggers to look out for. When you hear these, in all probability you should turn and run the other way:

¥ The herb or treatment works for a wide variety of ailments.

¥ Medical Science, Pharmaceutical Companies and/or The Government are suppressing it for financial gain. Remember: the profit margins on herbal supplements are high as well.

¥ There are testimonials or anecdotal evidence from popular personalities or seemingly scientific people without scientific studies to back them up.

¥ The treatment has not been published in a peer-reviewed journal. An article published in alternative journal is not the same as an article published in the Journal of the American Medical Association or the New England Journal of Medicine.

¥ Using disclaimers in pseudo-scientific jargon by people who are not accredited by the US Counsel of Education or the Council on Higher Education Accreditation.

¥ They claim that sugar, fluoride and foodstuffs bought in a non-health-food grocery store are poison.

¥ That the FDA has approved the product. The FDA does not approve anything. The agency disapproves any food items that are obviously poisonous and harmful. Herbs and nutritional supplements are classified as foods, not medicines, so no standards of safety or efficacy are required.

¥ They claim that a well balanced diet is not sufficient nutrition and that supplements are desperately needed.

What is the danger of unproven therapies?

Since supplements and herbs are not regulated there is no way to know exactly what's in them or even if what's advertised on the label is actually in the product. There have been several cases of Chinese herbal mixtures that seemed to work really well, right up until the patient died of liver damage because of the overdose of acetaminophen not listed in the ingredients. Because there is no regulation of herbal and alternative medicine, ingredients and doses vary widely. One study showed that the amount of St. John's Wort in one supplement varied from bottle to bottle. A recent study found that one brand of a Chinese supplement popularly known as "watermelon frost" used to control cold sores, contained dangerous levels of mercury. The amount of money spent on worthless cancer cures alone probably exceeds the amount of money spent on real medical cancer research, about \$1 billion. Unscrupulous health frauds can empty the bank accounts of desperate people while offering false hope. Time is wasted on trying ineffectual treatments turning serious health threats into deadly ones. Failure to act for many diseases like skin or breast or colon cancer is usually fatal when it could have been effectively treated.

Are there herbs that actually work?

Absolutely. There are some actual scientific studies done on herbs like Milk Thistle and St. John's Wort. But of course, this is how drugs are discovered. There are many medicines derived from plants that are used in mainstream medicine today. Digitalis from the Foxglove plant saves thousands of heart patients yearly. Aspirin obtained from Willow Bark is used as a blood thinner and as an analgesic. Opiates from the White Poppy are still the main prescription for serious pain. Of course critical thinking is useful in deciding on mainstream medical care as well.

¥ Sharpen your critical facilities and clear medical facts from fiction at these websites:

Health Care Reality Check

<http://www.hcrc.org/contrib/green/layman.html>

Examine what Dr. Stephen Barrett and the National Counsel Against Health Fraud have to say. Join the healthfraud discussion list.

<http://www.quackwatch.com/>

The Center for Science in the Public Interest

<http://www.cspinet.org/>

The Committee to Scientifically Investigate Claims of the Paranormal and publishers of Skeptical Inquirer magazine

<http://www.csicop.org>

¥ Go to your library and check out the periodic journal The Scientific Review of Alternative Medicine. The Spring/Summer issue of 1999 has an excellent article titled "On Deciding When Something is Real."

¥ Get a copy of Carl Sagan's book The Demon Haunted World: Science as a Candle in the Dark or visit

<http://www.2think.org/dhw.shtml>

# Healthwise: What You Should Know About Fibromyalgia

By Lucinda Porter, RN

Lucinda K. Porter, RN is a research nurse and patient educator at Stanford in the area of hepatology. She co-facilitates a support group and is active in many aspects of hepatitis C education. In addition to being HCV+, she has a life which include her husband and teenaged daughter.

The most common complaints of patients with chronic hepatitis C are fatigue and muscle or joint aches. These same symptoms also occur in patients with fibromyalgia. Although most patients with hepatitis C who have muscle aches do not have fibromyalgia, some patients may have both conditions.

Fibromyalgia is believed to affect two to six percent of the U.S. population. The term fibromyalgia means "pain in the muscles and fibrous connective tissue". Muscle pain and fatigue are two of the hallmark characteristics of fibromyalgia syndrome, but these two symptoms can also be associated with a host of other medical conditions.

For this reason, and because there is no specific test to confirm this condition, fibromyalgia can be difficult to diagnose. In the past, fibromyalgia was sometimes dismissed or overlooked by physicians. Some patients were treated for psychological problems.

However, over the past 10 years, fibromyalgia has become better understood and the symptoms that constitute an accurate diagnosis are better defined.

## Symptoms

Pain is the most common symptom. The location and description of the pain can be key in helping a doctor make an accurate diagnosis. In 1990, the American College of Rheumatology developed criteria for diagnosing fibromyalgia syndrome. These include:

¥ At least 3 months of widespread pain in all 4 quadrants of the body.

¥ Bilateral pain in 11 of 18 specific trigger points. The trigger points are located along the neck, shoulder, ribs, collarbone, hip and knee.

The pain associated with fibromyalgia has been described as burning, gnawing, or aching. Pain is almost always present. Some say it feels like having the flu. Sleep disturbances, fatigue, morning stiffness and headaches sometimes accompany fibromyalgia syndrome.

Difficulty concentrating and mood changes may also be reported, although this may be due to sleep disturbances commonly occurring with fibromyalgia. Some patients complain of depression, but it is believed that depression is more often a result of the symptoms caused by the fibromyalgia.

## Causes

Although there is a great deal of research being conducted on the causes and triggers of fibromyalgia, the cause is still unknown. Studies have shown that people with fibromyalgia syndrome have decreased circulation to the affected areas. They also have more substance P, a neuropeptide that acts as a pain transmitter. There is speculation that inappropriate exercise or poor posture may contribute to the condition. Trauma, infection, sleep disturbances, stress, and hormonal imbalances have all been suggested as possible causes.

## Treatment

Trial and error is one of the ways that patients learn how to manage fibromyalgia. Knowing what triggers exacerbations and what bring relief is key.

Lack of sleep, strenuous exercise, and stress may act as triggers, while relaxation techniques and moderate exercise may offer relief. Here are some further treatment options:

¥ Physical therapy

¥ Stretching

- ¥ Moderate exercise (start very gradually)
- ¥ Massage (some people say certain types of massage worsens their condition)
- ¥ Hot baths
- ¥ Meditation
- ¥ Medication (Discuss this with your doctor. There are a number of options to try, such as nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory or anti-depressant drugs.)

If you feel that you might have fibromyalgia, talk to your physician. Although there may be similarities between the symptoms related to hepatitis C and those of fibromyalgia, these two conditions are quite different. Further, there are many other disorders that may cause similar symptoms.

A well informed primary care doctor, a physiatrist or rheumatologist can evaluate your situation and make recommendations. If your physician lacks knowledge on the subject, or does not take your symptoms seriously, find another doctor.

For More Information

¥ If you need more information contact the Arthritis Foundation at (800) 283-7800 or <http://www.arthritis.org>

¥ Send a business-sized SASE to the National Chronic Fatigue Syndrome and Fibromyalgia Association, P.O. Box 18426, Kansas City, MO 64133

¥ An excellent Internet site that offers quite a bit of information can be found at:  
<http://members.bellatlantic.net/~clotho/fibro.htm>

¥ For support, there are Internet chat groups. Keep in mind that the Internet is a tool, but unless you know how to use it, you can do as much harm as good.

Sources for this article:

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## Annoying, Painful and Frustrating: Dry Mouth

By Joe Shaw

Joe Shaw works in the Development and Communications department of a social service agency for people who are blind or visually impaired. Diagnosed with HCV in January 1998, he lives with his partner and his two pugs, Willie and Sammie in Long Beach, CA.

Dry mouth is one of the most stubborn and annoying side effects of interferon therapy. I know: it drove me crazy. Dry mouth is often exacerbated by anti-depressants, which are known to cause dry mouth as well. Doctors call it "xerostomia." I call it a pain in the butt. Dry mouth, to me, was a serious quality of life issue. It annoyed me every single moment of the day for months on end.

The saliva in our mouths performs a variety of functions including cleaning, lubrication, chemical protection and antibody and cell mediated immune defenses. Because of its importance in fighting plaque and in helping prevent tooth decay, some people on interferon therapy report a sudden increase in cavities, especially if their dry mouth is severe.

Dry mouth is usually worse at night and frequently creates a sore tongue, gums and cheeks. It may produce frothy, foamy and stringy saliva, difficulty talking, eating and swallowing; bad breath; dental decay and tooth sensitivity. Icky!!!

How do we manage dry mouth? Recently I came across these strategies on the internet:

¥ Stimulate your saliva! Chewing gum or sugar-free candies produce saliva and increased fluid intake helps reduce the effects of dehydration, and in severe cases, oral administration of pilocarpine solution (0.5 mg/ml, 51nl qld).

¥ Avoid hot and spicy foods, such as salsa or curry. They may exacerbate the redness and soreness in your mouth.

¥ Make sure you take care of your teeth! Practice preventive dental care, brush after every meal, floss, etc. etc. Home fluoride application either as a rinse or gel is essential and changing to a non foaming, dry mouth toothpaste will improve oral comfort.

¥ Drink lots of water! Seems like a no-brainer to me, although it only provides short term relief. There are saliva replacements on the market (ask your health-care provider) but they do not simulate the protective functions of saliva and without the appropriate preventive care, tooth decay is a big problem.

¥ See your dentist! Ideally all patients with dry mouth should have a thorough dental examination and regular dental care to help manage the symptoms. A primary care physician can also suggest strategies to help limit the potential damage to your teeth.

## **HIV-Infected Patients With Liver Disease Require Lower Dose of Amprenavir**

A dosage adjustment of the HIV protease inhibitor amprenavir is required for patients with liver disease, according to a report in the April issue of *Antimicrobial Agents and Chemotherapy*. Researchers from Glaxo-Wellcome in France, studied the effect of liver disease on the pharmacokinetics of amprenavir, which was approved last year by the FDA for the treatment of HIV infection.

Based on their findings, they suggest that to achieve the clinical equivalent of 1,200 mg amprenavir twice daily, patients with Child-Pugh scores of 5 to 8 should receive a twice-daily 450-mg dose of amprenavir, and subjects with Child-Pugh scores of 9 to 15 should receive a twice-daily 300-dose of amprenavir. Child-Pugh scores measure the severity of liver damage.

## **New Northern California Helpline**

Hepatitis C Support Project has launched a new Helpline / Support Group & Event information hotline serving Northern California.  
415/978-2400

Leave a message and a volunteer will return your call within 24 hours.

Support Group Listings  
415/978-2400 press 2#

Event Group Listings  
415/978-2400 press 3#