

Myofascial Release Therapy Compared to Massage in Reducing Symptoms of Fibromyalgia

Ginevra Liptan¹, Kim Dupree Jones², Scott Mist², Cheryl Wright², Anna Artz²

¹ The Frida Center for Fibromyalgia, 6400 SW Canyon Ct. Ste 100, Portland, OR 97221
Phone: 503-477-9616 Fax: 503-477-9808 email: gliptan@fridacenter.com

² OHSU School of Nursing, 3455 SW US Veterans Hospital Rd., Portland, Or. 97239

BACKGROUND People with fibromyalgia (FM) have persistent widespread pain and soft tissue tenderness. As an adjunct to drug therapies, they often seek bodywork such as massage for pain reduction. Recently the pain-generating role of the fascia in maintaining FM symptoms has been suggested [1] indicating that manual therapy that addresses the fascia may be helpful in managing FM symptoms. Two randomized controlled trials of myofascial release therapy (MFR) compared to sham ultra-sound found significant reduction in tender points and pain scores that persisted at one-month post-intervention. The study authors concluded that further research was warranted to compare outcomes obtained with MFR with those of other manual therapies. [2, 3]

METHODS The purpose of the present study was to compare myofascial release to Swedish massage in women with FM. Eight subjects received myofascial release while four subjects received Swedish massage for 90 minutes weekly for four weeks. On average, the subjects were 34.5 years of age (SD=5.5), with FM for 2.6 years (SD=0.9), with no baseline differences between groups.

RESULTS The Aickin separation test [4] indicated that the primary outcome, Fibromyalgia Impact Questionnaire-Revised Total Change Score for the myofascial group trended (mean = 10.14, SD = 16.2) in the hypothesized and positive direction compared to the Swedish massage group (mean = 0.33, SD = 4.93).

CONCLUSIONS There were no adverse events or early discontinuations indicating that both interventions were feasible and acceptable to patients despite tenderness to touch (baseline myalgic score 31.9 (SD=7.7) and 36.3 (SD=3.1) in the myofascial and Swedish massage groups respectively). Larger randomized controlled trials are supported by the separation test, particularly focusing on longer-term follow up to compare duration of improvement after MFR compared to standard Swedish-type massage.

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