

## Fibromyalgia and Janet L.

I've had fibromyalgia for 20 years, although it wasn't diagnosed until recently. Most people who have fibromyalgia do not get properly diagnosed until they have had it for at least seven years. That's because it is a progressive disease, and when it starts out it might only manifest as a stiff neck or isolated pain and general fatigue. The symptoms, in other words, are so general they can be interpreted as the flu, tired muscles, a sleep disorder, or any number of less serious problems.

When I first started experiencing the pain of fibromyalgia I was living in the mountains in Washington State. In that often cold, usually moist climate my body behaved like a barometer—whenever the weather changed my body would feel it. Whether it was dampness, cold, a change in the wind—any change would register in my body as pain. I went to rheumatologists, chiropractors, all kinds of doctors about my pain, but none of them had a solution for me.

One doctor started me on cortisone shots. We reached a point where he was shooting cortisone into 42 muscles in my back every day. He finally said, "Janet, I can't do this any more. You've become a human pincushion."

I would have good days and bad days. On my good days I was energetic and took part in family activities with great zest. On bad days I wouldn't be able to get dressed without stopping a few times to lie down and rest and get my energy back.

In the days before the fibromyalgia was advanced, my husband and I decided to build our dream house up in the mountains in Cardiff. I took a very active part in designing it, a house on three levels. It was a project that went on for several years. By the time we were close to finishing it, the major symptoms of my fibromyalgia had set in. At that point, I found it unbearable to climb stairs. I had to wonder who that person was who had thought to design a three-story house. But no one had diagnosed me or told me my problem would get worse every year.

I was given various medications for pain, Neurontin being the one I ended up taking long-term. It dulled the pain without getting at the source of the problem.

The way I dealt with the pain in the early days was to be very active. Inactivity seemed to exacerbate the stiffness and pain, so I threw myself into family activities. We have a large extended family up north and I loved making dinners and entertaining. I could forget about my pain if I had a goal like cooking for 40 people. However, the activity took a lot out of me and after these dinners were over I would have to recuperate for a week.

Part of the fibromyalgia was a sleeping problem—the pain kept me awake. Often I would get only three hours of sleep at night. I would toss and turn and then finally go to my husband's recliner to

get some sleep. It was easier to find a comfortable position there. I also started getting migraine headaches.

Gradually I reached the point where I was quite debilitated. If it were snowing outside I could only walk a half a block or so before exhaustion would set in. My knees would get so swollen they would be like footballs. I couldn't bend them.

A rheumatologist finally diagnosed me. He checked my pressure points and told me all 18 of them were inflamed. He said I had both osteoarthritis and fibromyalgia.

I finally had a diagnosis, but the rheumatologist didn't have a solution for my pain. He just prescribed more Neurontin. My husband and I arrived at the point where we were ready to sacrifice our dream house so we could live in a warm, dry climate where I could be in less pain. We sold our house in Cardiff and bought a house in the desert. As soon as we'd moved in I contacted a rheumatologist—I needed a local source for my Neurontin. This doctor checked my pressure points, and they were, as usual, inflamed.

Meanwhile, I happened to see Dr. Platt on television talking about hormones and weight loss. I thought that if I could lose some weight I might be able to move around better. I weighed 185 back then, and I am 5 feet tall. The weight seemed to exacerbate my pain. So I decided to go in to see him.

He was astounding. I sat and talked to him for two and a half hours for my first visit! He went over all my records, and then he started asking me such pointed questions that I kept on saying to myself, "How did he know that?"

He told me I was internalizing anger and that I needed to face what was angering me and cope with it. We talked about some fairly personal stuff. He gave me some ideas for changing the patterns in my life that were forcing me to swallow all this anger. He said I could put the fibromyalgia into remission through lifestyle changes and balancing my hormones.

I started taking progesterone and I went on the diet. Three weeks after seeing Dr. Platt I went to see the rheumatologist. He checked my pressure points and told me there was no more inflammation. I told him that for the first time I was able to sleep through the night and that I didn't have pain any more. This was three weeks after starting the progesterone! The rheumatologist said, "Whatever you're doing, continue doing it. Your osteoarthritis has gone into remission."

I got really excited about how effective the progesterone had been. The next time I went in to see Dr. Platt I wanted to have a whole blood panel done. If one hormone could take away all that pain, what else could we accomplish by balancing all of my hormones?

When he examined my blood panel, Dr. Platt said that I had a thyroid deficiency. He gave me a prescription for thyroid medication and my energy level increased dramatically. I continued with the diet, eventually losing 53 pounds. Today I weigh 132 and I feel so incredible, it's as though someone gave me back my life from years ago. I feel young inside. When I visited my grandchildren up north last time, I went hiking and swimming with them, things I'd never been able to do. "It's like we have a new grandma!" all the kids said.

Dr. Platt also prescribed testosterone, which has given me back my sex life—my husband is absolutely thrilled.

I feel so blessed to have met Dr. Platt. He's changed my life. Some of my friends ask me whether I'd have sold my dream house if I'd known I was going to feel this good—today I'd have no problem with those flights of stairs. But I know everything happens for a reason. I'm just grateful things have turned out the way they have.