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Neurobiology of fibromyalgia and chronic widespread pain.

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Abstract

Fibromyalgia is the current term for chronic widespread musculoskeletal pain for which no alternative cause can be identified. The underlying mechanisms, in both human and animal studies, for the continued pain in individuals with fibromyalgia will be explored in this review. There is a substantial amount of support for alterations of central nervous system nociceptive processing in people with fibromyalgia, and that psychological factors such as stress can enhance the pain experience. Emerging evidence has begun exploring other potential mechanisms including a peripheral nervous system component to the generation of pain and the role of systemic inflammation. We will explore the data and neurobiology related to the role of the CNS in nociceptive processing, followed by a short review of studies examining potential peripheral nervous system changes and cytokine involvement. We will not only explore the data from human subjects with fibromyalgia but will relate this to findings from animal models of fibromyalgia. We conclude that fibromyalgia and related disorders are heterogenous conditions with a complicated pathobiology with patients falling along a continuum with one end a purely peripherally driven painful condition and the other end of the continuum is when pain is purely centrally driven.

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KEYWORDS: central sensitization; chronic pain; fibromyalgia; hyperalgesia; neurobiology; pain

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