



Myofascial Release for
Fibromyalgia
and other chronic pain conditions





“It is as if all of my joints were locked and I am caught inside, as though imprisoned in a kind of body or an envelope that has padlocks inside, like doors that I cannot open.”

Fibromyalgia patient interview
(Valenzuela-Moguillansky, 2012)

Fibromyalgia is a 'syndrome'

In other words a name given to a collection of symptoms

The symptoms can be endless but in short FMS can be mainly characterised by **pain, fatigue, and sleep disruption.**



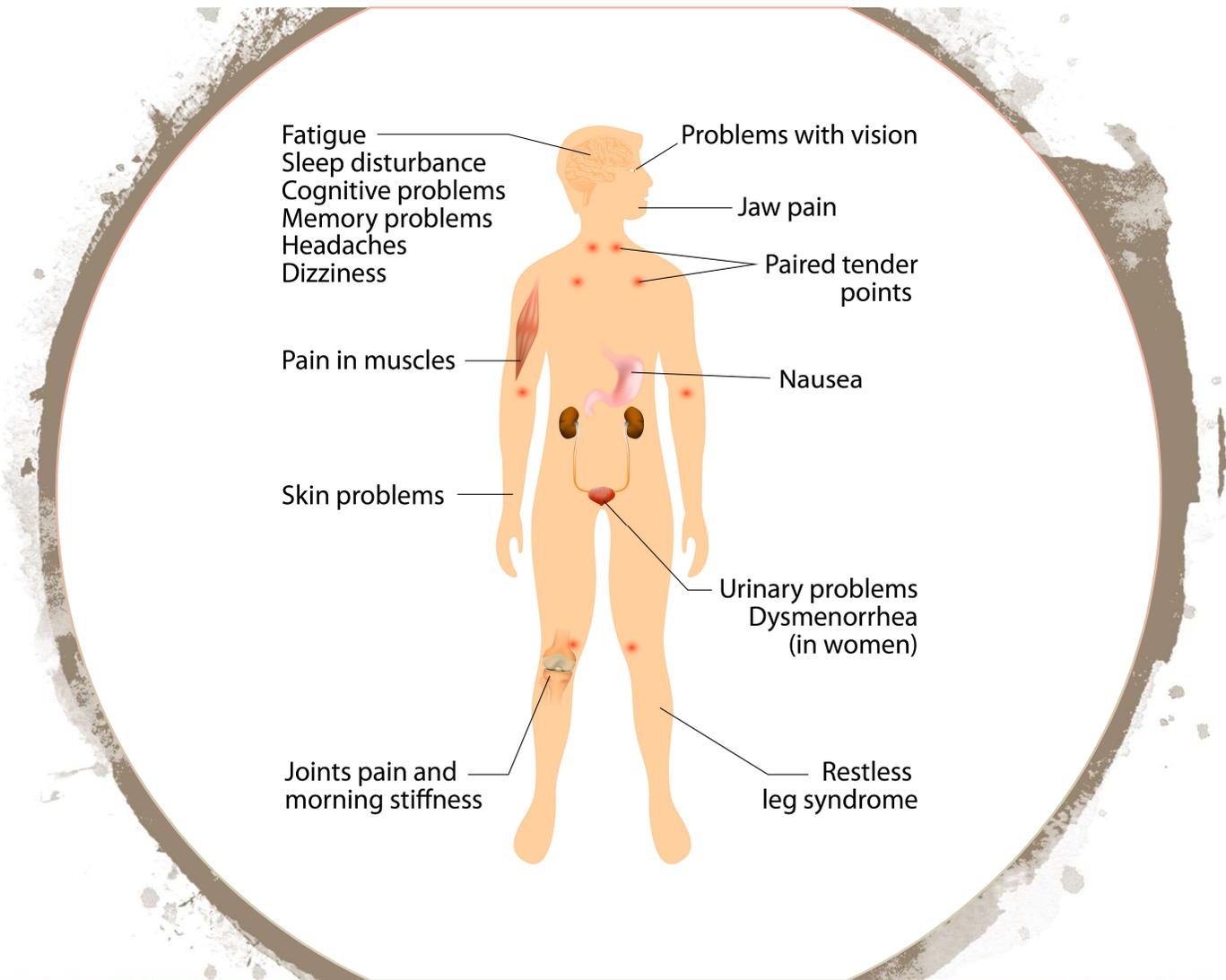


Fibromyalgia Syndrome commonly exists with mental health and emotional issues including:

- Anxiety
- Panic disorder
- Post-traumatic stress disorder
- General depression



A shopping list of
symptoms



Fatigue
Sleep disturbance
Cognitive problems
Memory problems
Headaches
Dizziness

Problems with vision
Jaw pain
Paired tender points
Nausea
Urinary problems
Dysmenorrhea (in women)
Restless leg syndrome

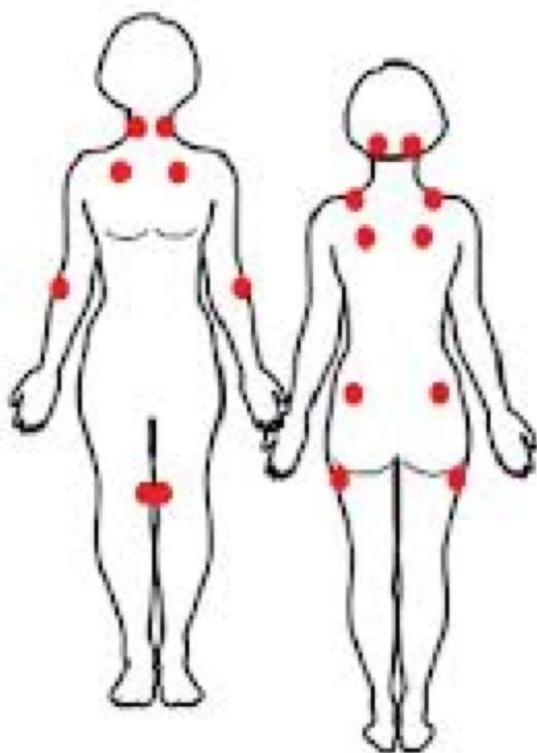
Pain in muscles
Skin problems
Joints pain and morning stiffness

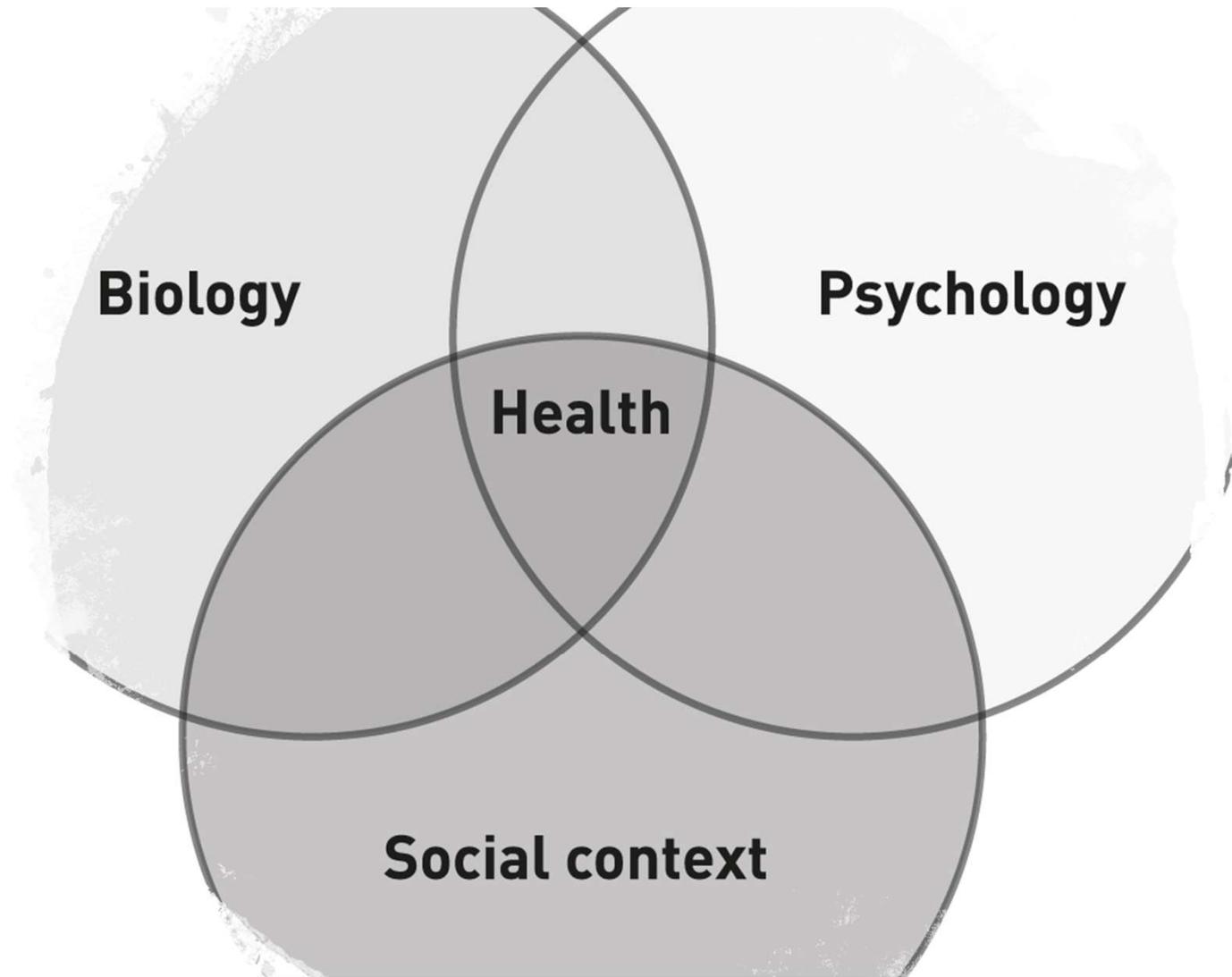


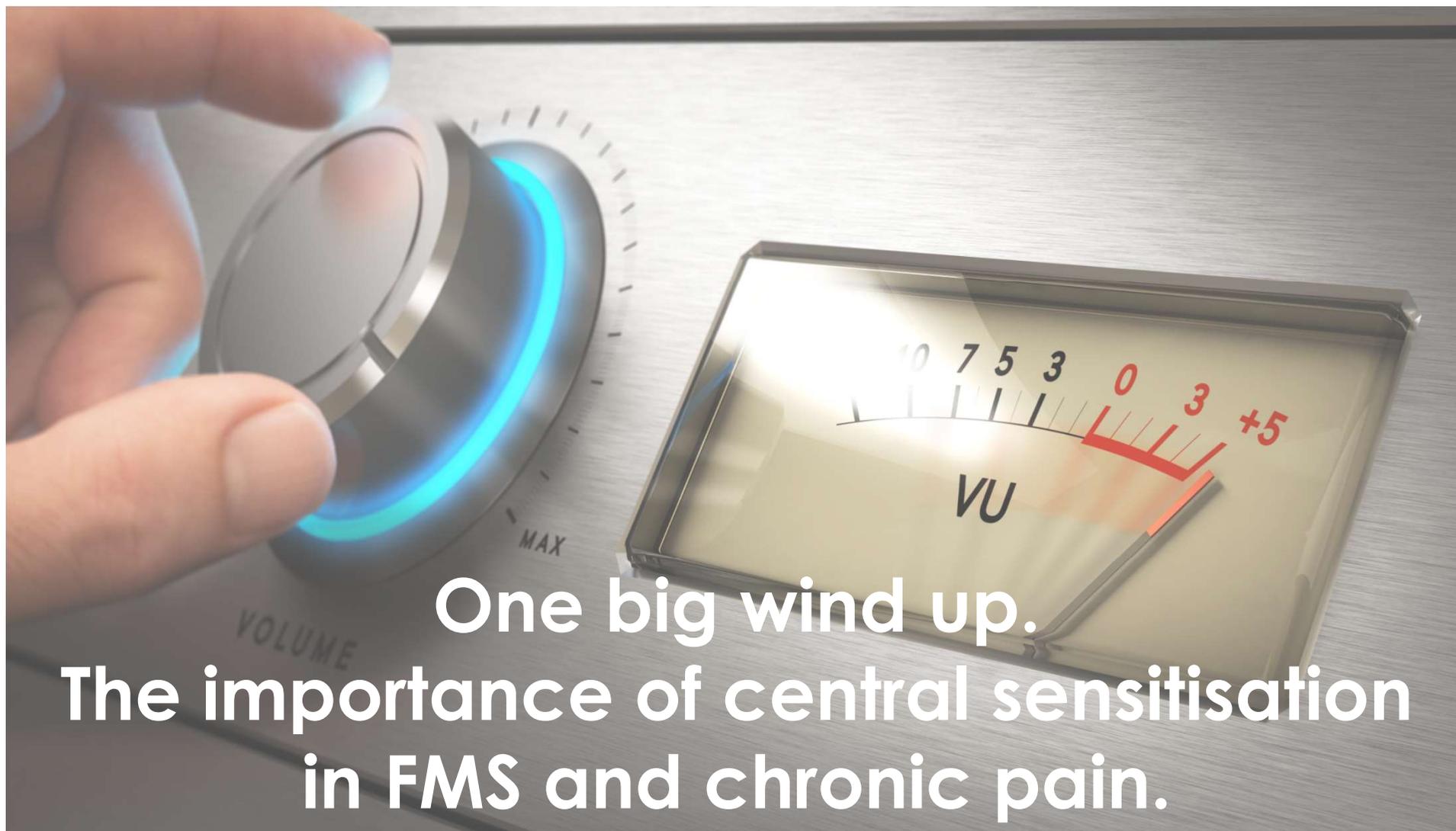
- It is common for sufferers to have spent months or years undergoing medical tests in an attempt to find a cause.
- Clients may have been told that the symptoms are psychological or exaggerated.
- There is often an intense feeling of “not being believed”.

Medical Criteria for diagnosing FMS

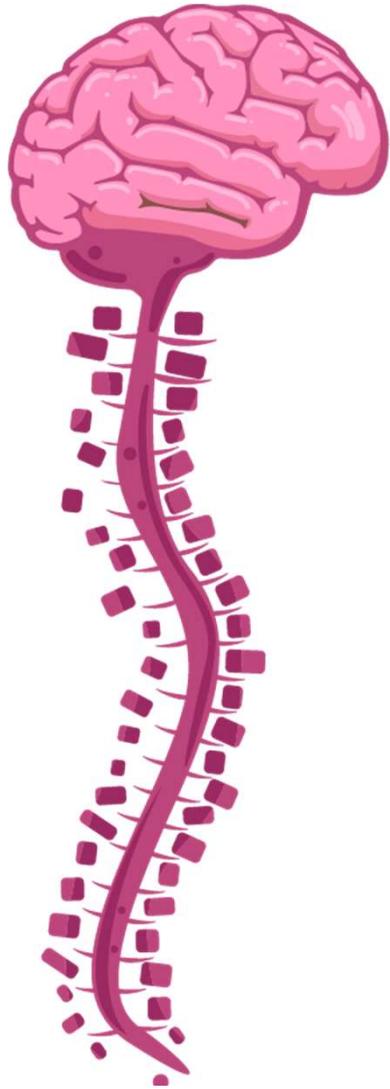
- Severe pain in three to six different areas of the body, or milder pain in seven or more different areas
- Symptoms have stayed at a similar level for at least three months
- No other reason for symptoms







**One big wind up.
The importance of central sensitisation
in FMS and chronic pain.**



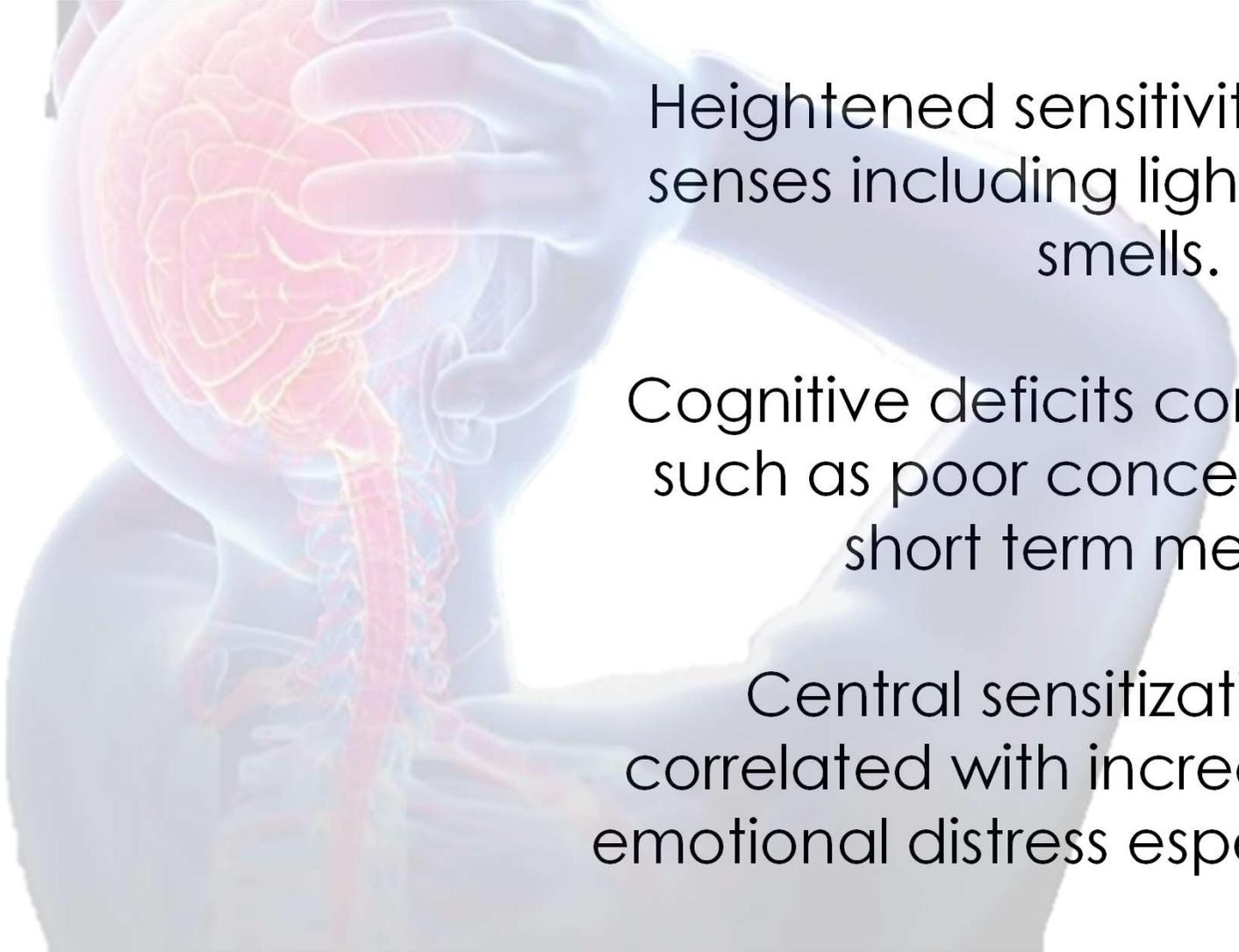
In central sensitisation, the sympathetic nervous system is in a persistent state of high sensitivity, known as 'wind up'.

This results in the spinal cord and brain acting like a faulty amplifier that literally turns up the volume of any pain signals.

The client is in real pain even though there is no injury or damage to the tissues or organs of the body.

Central sensitisation has 2 main features: *allodynia* and *hyperalgesia*

- **Allodynia** – This is when a neutral stimulus is interpreted by the brain as painful – for example, the stroke of a feather feels like being seared by a blowtorch.
- **Hyperalgesia**- a normally painful stimulus is interpreted as being much more painful

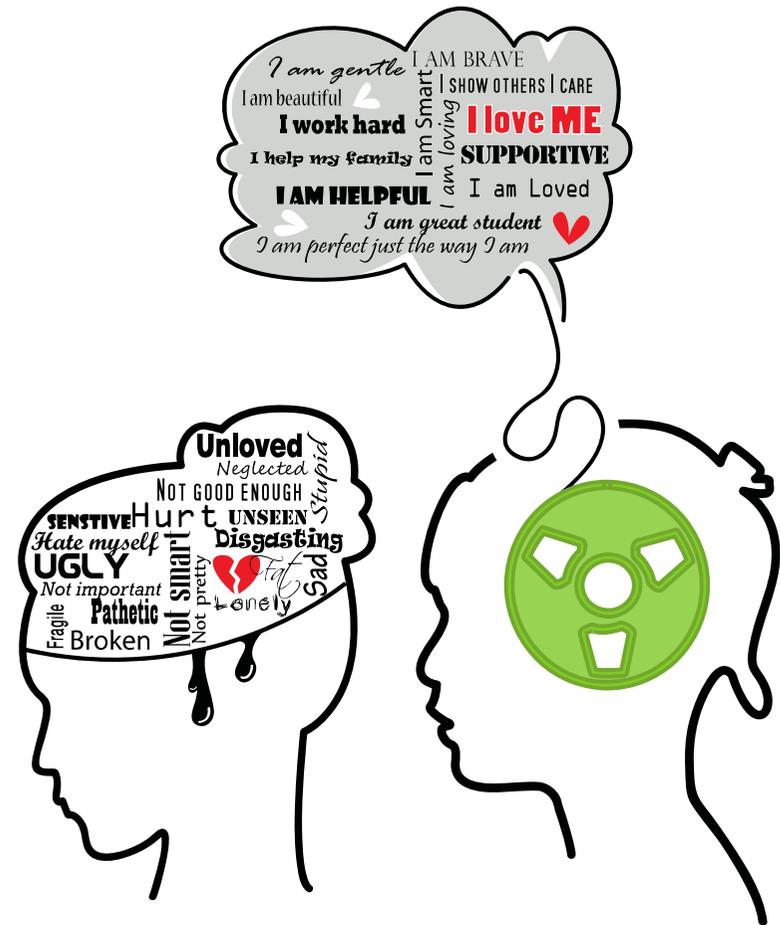


Heightened sensitivities across all senses including light, sound and smells.

Cognitive deficits common to FMS such as poor concentration and short term memory.

Central sensitization is also correlated with increased levels of emotional distress especially anxiety.

It is vitally important when treating fibromyalgia to understand that a main part of our job is to address this faulty and over sensitized alarm system.



Fascia
The
missing
component



- No definite evidence of muscle pathology in fibromyalgia has been found. However, there is some evidence for dysfunction of the intramuscular connective tissue, or fascia, in fibromyalgia.
- Research by Liptan (2010) proposes that inflammation of the fascia is the source of peripheral nociceptive input that leads to central sensitization in fibromyalgia.
- The inflammation of the fascia is similar to that described in conditions such as plantar fasciitis and lateral epicondylitis,
- Inflammation and dysfunction of the fascia may lead to central sensitization in fibromyalgia.
- In FMS the brain is mistakenly triggering the danger or “fight or flight” alarm bells all the time. This leads to chronically tightened muscles. Research suggests the tightness lies not just in the muscles but the fascia which generates inflammation and trigger points

Benefits of massage-myofascial release therapy on pain, anxiety, quality of sleep, depression, and quality of life in patients with fibromyalgia.

[Castro-Sánchez AM](#)¹ et al

Myofascial release techniques improved pain and quality of life in patients with fibromyalgia.

[Man Ther.](#) 2015 Apr;20(2):257-64. doi: 10.1016/j.math.2014.09.003. Epub 2014 Oct 5.

Effectiveness of different styles of massage therapy in fibromyalgia: a systematic review and meta-analysis.

[Yuan SL](#)¹, [Matsutani LA](#)², [Marques AP](#)².

Overall, most styles of massage therapy consistently improved the quality of life of fibromyalgia patients.

Massage therapy for fibromyalgia: a systematic review and meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials.

[Li YH](#)¹, [Wang FY](#)¹, [Feng CQ](#)¹, [Yang XF](#)¹, [Sun YH](#)¹.

Massage therapy with duration \geq 5 weeks had beneficial immediate effects on improving pain, anxiety, and depression in patients with FM. Massage therapy should be one of the viable complementary and alternative treatments for FM.

[Clin Rehabil.](#) 2011 Sep;25(9):800-13. doi: 10.1177/0269215511399476. Epub 2011 Jun 14.

Effects of myofascial release techniques on pain, physical function, and postural stability in patients with fibromyalgia: a randomized controlled trial.

[Castro-Sánchez AM](#)¹, [Matarán-Peñarrocha GA](#), [Arroyo-Morales M](#), [Saavedra-Hernández M](#), [Fernández-Sola C](#), [Moreno-Lorenzo C](#).

The results suggest that myofascial release techniques can be a complementary therapy for pain symptoms, physical function and clinical severity but do not improve postural stability in patients with fibromyalgia syndrome.



Manual therapy and Fibromyalgia

- Can be challenging due to extreme sensitivity of system
- Every detail of treatment approach needs to be thought through – smells, positioning, warmth, techniques.
- Take nothing for granted!

Top tips for treatment approaches

- Allow a good half hour for your **initial consultation** assessment and interview. FMS clients often have complex histories and it is vitally important that they feel truly heard
- **Share your treatment plan:** Tell them what you are doing and why and expect their input and comment.
- **Be extra careful with basic client care.** Have plenty of blankets ready, and have pillows to hand as basic positioning might be uncomfortable. Room might need to be warmer than usual

- Allow clients to change position often if they want. Staying in one position can be painful.
- Expect the tiniest amount of treatment to have a disproportionately enormous effect; don't think you have to pack very much in to one treatment
- Remember the main issue in FMS is central sensitization – an *over-reaction to threats*. Treatment that is too intense may trigger the warning system and make things worse

- Listen to your client, take their word for everything they say. They really do know best. If they say 'don't touch my stomach', DON'T!
- Keep treatments short if necessary, i.e. 20 – 30 minutes pain release at the most, follow with relaxation massage
- Be very, very gentle, light rather than deep. Find out each time which depth of weight is best for the client: what for us is felt as discomfort can be extremely painful to an FMS client
- With FMS you have to be prepared to be in it for the long haul. Progress can be very very slow over several treatments and often it doesn't seem as if there has been much progress

A multi-modal approach to treatment

- Heat
- Fascial work
- Muscles – treating trigger points
- Acupressure points
- Stretching
- Teaching self care











