

Seattleites find relief from chronic pain 📺

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By JEAN ENERSEN / KING 5 News



Fibromyalgia is a chronic condition most noted by pain at even the slightest touch

SEATTLE - As many as 10 million Americans suffer from fibromyalgia, a chronic condition most noted by pain at even the slightest touch.

Despite a host of symptoms, it's often misdiagnosed and misunderstood, even by doctors. But local research is leading to new hope.

While there is no known cure, the FDA recently approved the first drug - called-Lyrica - to treat the painful syndrome.

And local research is now focusing on the brain.

"It's almost as though there's an amplifier in the brain that kind of increases the signal and activates those pain centers," said Dr. David Avery, of Harborview.

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Avery is conducting a clinical trial to see if transcranial magnetic stimulation can alter the brain's electrical activity and provide some relief.

It worked for Seattle resident Rosemary Gregory.

"I think I was like 20 minutes into the session and the pain was gone," she said.

Just sitting still used to be torture for her, ever since a car accident 10 years ago.

"Pretty much the end of my life as I knew it came with that automobile accident and the onset of this thing," she said.

That "thing" was fibromyalgia. It mostly strikes middle-aged women. Yet many, like Lynne Matallana, are often misdiagnosed.

"It took over 37 doctors over a 2-1/2 year period before I even heard the word fibromyalgia and I started to think maybe there wasn't anything wrong with me and that I was just imagining these symptoms," said Matallana, of the National Fibromyalgia Association.

The symptoms may seem unrelated, and conventional tests typically come back normal.

"It doesn't have any markers to standard blood tests or X-rays," said Dr. Patrick Wood, an expert on fibromyalgia. "There's nothing in the blood that says, 'I have fibromyalgia.' There's nothing you're going to see on an X-ray."

However, the condition can be confirmed using a special exam called the Manual Tenderpoint Survey.

"The characteristic 18 tender points are palpated with the thumb to determine whether or not they're tender to light touch," said Avery.

The study at Harborview is now recruiting female patients with widespread chronic pain. You don't need to be diagnosed with fibromyalgia to qualify.

The study is double-blinded, meaning some of the patients will get transcranial magnetic stimulation, and others will get a sham treatment, but even the researchers won't know who's in which group.

For more information, contact Laura Felice, at 206-543-9731 or ljf999@u.washington.edu.

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