

# ***Will Hyperbaric Oxygen Therapy Become a Viable Treatment Modality for Fibromyalgia Syndrome? RSD***

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In the present era of scientifically oriented medicine it has become increasingly difficult to design and conduct scientific research to prove or disprove efficacy of a given therapeutic modality. Often times, however, we learn how new modalities can help sufferers of different health conditions only by accident.

Many fibromyalgia patients can easily appreciate how much pain and swelling in the extremities can effect their well being and quality of life.

There is a condition, symptoms of which remind me of symptoms of fibromyalgia. The condition that I am referring to is called Reflex Sympathetic Dystrophy Syndrome (RSDS)

Reflex Sympathetic Dystrophy Syndrome (RSDS) is a painful condition that in addition to “burning” pain, tenderness and swelling of extremities can include swelling, sweating, warmth and/or coolness, flushing, discoloration and shiny skin. RSDS is also known as “the shoulder-hand syndrome,” “causalgia” and “Sudeck’s atrophy.” There are many theories why RSDS can take place. Some of them suggest that irritation of nervous tissue can cause abnormal impulses along nerves that subsequently effect blood vessels and skin.

The onset of RSDS symptoms can come unexpectedly and sometimes it can come in several stages.

**Stage I** Acute (3-6 months) - during this stage, pain, swelling, burning, flushing, sweating and tenderness can develop. Also during this stage, physician can notice patchy bone thinning on the X-ray.

**Stage II** Dystrophic (3-6 months) - during this stage, swelling and flushing usually diminish, but changes in skin when it becomes shiny, thickened coupled with development of contracture and persistent pain can occur.

**Stage III** Atrophic - during this stage, loss of motion and function in the involved extremities, thinning of the fatty layers under the skin and significant osteoporosis will take place.

**Usual treatment for RSDS includes:**

- Cool, moist applications
- Gradual exercising
- Non – steroid anti-inflammatory drugs
- High doses of Pregnasone
- In severe cases a nerve block with anaesthetic is injected into the specialized area

A few reports reflecting efficacy of hyperbaric oxygen therapy (HBOT) attracted my attention. One of them tells how a patient who was suffering from acute smoke inhalation also had a long medical history that included Reflex Sympathetic Dystrophy Syndrome of the left foot and ankle. The entire foot and ankle were tender and cool to palpation and range of motion was severely reduced. Patient was referred for hyperbaric oxygen therapy to ward off symptoms of smoke inhalation. She underwent a number of HBOT sessions. Fifteen minutes inside the hyperbaric chamber during her first session patient enthusiastically reported lessening of pain in her foot. She also was extremely happy to tell the whole world that her foot is much warmer to the touch and is not as blue as it used to be. Subsequent treatment improved her condition.

Pain, inflammation, tenderness and swelling are the terms too familiar to fibromyalgia sufferers and I am sure that many of them have been wondering if hyperbaric oxygen therapy (HBOT) could be their savior.

Case in Point: BD, a 55 year old nutritionist from Costa Rica, has been suffering from fibromyalgia syndrome for a period of ten years prior to coming into my office and requesting hyperbaric oxygen therapy (HBOT). She also recently suffered a ruptured appendicitis with leftover necrotic tissues in her lower abdominal region. BD has the whole “bouquet,” Epstein-Barr virus, cytomegalo virus (CMV), yeast overgrowth, allergies, asthma, you mention it, she had it. I saw BD following twenty hyperbaric oxygen treatments (HBOT) and guess what? Her fibromyalgia pains disappeared completely and took along the whole myriad of concurrent symptoms!

A number of patients who suffer from fibromyalgia and have been treated with hyperbaric oxygen therapy have reported the same improvement in their pain severity, anxiety levels and fatigue. Certainly, they were ecstatic to learn that their energy level has risen to the sky and finally libido showed up for a change and their outlook moved to the other side.