

# Effectiveness of Chinese Herbal Treatment for Fibromyalgia and Chronic Fatigue Syndrome

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## ABSTRACT

### OBJECTIVE

To measure the effectiveness of customized Chinese Herbal treatment for fibromyalgia and chronic fatigue syndrome.

### STUDY DESIGN

This study is a retrospective case series that includes the outcome of patients with a previous diagnosis of chronic fatigue and/or fibromyalgia syndromes who presented to the clinical practice of J. Gilbert for Chinese herbal consultation and who completed or quit treatment between the years of 1999 – 2005.

### DATA SOURCE

Data were obtained from the clinical charts of J. Gilbert, board-certified practitioner of Chinese Herbology, practicing in the states of Maryland and Virginia.

### PATIENT POPULATION DESCRIPTION

Thirty-eight patients are included in this study, of which 22 had a prior diagnosis of chronic fatigue syndrome, twenty patients had a prior diagnosis of fibromyalgia, and 4 patients had a prior diagnosis of both syndromes. They reported having their diagnosis an average of 8.6 years prior to presenting for treatment to J. Gilbert. They averaged 44.0 years old, 76.3% were female, had completed an average of 4.6 years of education past high school, and 5.3% were applying for or were already on disability at the time of presentation.

### OUTCOME MEASURED

A patient is defined as “successfully recovered” from fibromyalgia or chronic fatigue syndrome (or both) if both the patient and practitioner (J. Gilbert) were in agreement regarding the patient’s return to previous level of functioning, were free from any persistent symptoms (pain, irritable bowel syndrome, memory or concentration problems, sleep dysfunction, etc.) associated with their fibromyalgia or chronic fatigue syndrome, and were off any medications or dietary supplements started specifically for their fibromyalgia or chronic fatigue syndrome, or associated symptoms. If a patient did not respond to herbal treatment or chose to terminate treatment for any reason, they are defined as a “non-responder” in this case series. No patients were excluded from this study.

### RESULTS

Twenty-eight of the 38 patients in this case series “successfully recovered” from their respective conditions of fibromyalgia or chronic fatigue syndrome (or both), showing an effectiveness rate of 73.7 percent. Similar recovery rates were obtained when patients with fibromyalgia and chronic fatigue syndrome were considered separately. The average length of treatment was 10.3 months.

### CONCLUSION

Customized Chinese herbal treatment, as prescribed by J. Gilbert, has demonstrated recovery from fibromyalgia and chronic fatigue syndrome to previous levels of health, without the need for on-going prescription medications or dietary supplements to sustain recovery or to abate symptoms, in over 73% of patients in this study population.

**KEYWORDS:**

Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, CFS, Fibromyalgia, FM, Treatment, Chinese Herbs, Traditional Chinese Medicine, Integrative Medicine, Retrospective, Case Series, Stress, Recovery, Dietary Supplements, Autonomic Nervous System

**ABOUT THE AUTHORS:**

**Janine A Blackman** earned her MD and PhD in Epidemiology at University of Maryland School of Medicine. She is board-certified in Family Medicine and Fellowship trained in Integrative Medicine. She is past Assistant Professor in Family Medicine and past Medical Director of Integrative Medicine at University of Maryland. She presently serves as Medical Director and Research Director of The Gilbert Clinic, a private multi-disciplinary, fully integrated medical practice in the Washington DC metro area.

**Jonathan P Gilbert** earned a diploma in Traditional Oriental Medicine from the London Academy of Oriental Medicine, and a diploma from the Traditional Medical Institute, Saigon, Vietnam, where he provided Traditional Chinese Medicine in a 500-bed state teaching hospital. He also served in a 12-year private apprenticeship with Dr. Phouc Huynh in the study of Jinkui Yaolue (6-Division) theory and practice. He had a private Chinese Medicine practice in London prior to moving to the United States. He is board-certified in both Chinese Herbology and Acupuncture through the National Certification Commission on Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine (NCCAOM) in the United States and currently serves as a Consultant to the Biomedicine Committee of the NCCAOM. From 2004-5 he served as a Senior Consultant in Chinese Herbology at University of Maryland's Center for Integrative Medicine. He is president and co-founder of The Gilbert Clinic, a multi-disciplinary, fully integrated medical practice in the Washington DC metro area. The application of 6 Division Theory as taught to Jonathan Gilbert concentrated on its application to chronic neurological disease.

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Note: This study has been published by The Gilbert Clinic, Inc. It was the decision of the first author to not submit this paper to a peer review journal for publication. The foremost reason for this decision is that publication in a peer review journal in the United States requires the medical diagnoses under investigation to have been verified by a qualified medical doctor. Patient data in this study were obtained through the clinical charts of J. Gilbert, a Chinese Herbal practitioner. Records from the patients' various medical doctors were not available to verify their diagnoses. Hence, this study relies on the patients' self-reporting of their diagnosis from their medical doctor, along with the Chinese medical assessment by J. Gilbert. This theoretical weakness of the study is discussed more fully in the discussion section of this paper. Also, "qualified" verification of the diagnoses of fibromyalgia or chronic fatigue syndrome is included in a newer prospective study, as discussed in the conclusion of this paper.