

Sound Massage Restores My Quality Of Life

The Director of the Peter Hess®Academy USA Texas reports on her personal journey with sound

by Margit Willems Whitaker

The year 2005 marks an important turning point in my life, however, unfortunately very differently than I had expected. Years ago, I had lost my husband and, 14 years later, also my eldest son Tommy, who suffered from a neuro-muscular disease. And now seemed the right time to reinvent my life; I was offered employment with the US Senate in Washington DC, a position I had strived to attain for years. I accepted immediately, but then everything turned out differently than I had thought. The new position required a move that was associated with many changes: until then, I lived in a quiet house, now in a noisy downtown apartment; I was used to driving my car to work, now I had to commute by metro since there were no parking places in front of my office building; and lastly, instead of dealing with the Texas heat, my body had to adjust to cold temperatures and high humidity. These factors alone could have been potential triggers for the fibromyalgia¹ that I was diagnosed with much later – what exactly caused the disease remains unclear, as trigger factors for this painful disease generally remain unspecified.

My long suffering until the correct diagnosis

It all began when I slipped on the ice and hit my face on the front bumper of a car. This fall derailed me in the truest sense of the word, and everything started to go downhill after this event. In hindsight, all the symptoms typical for my disease appeared after the accident.

Although the scars on my face healed quickly and the bruises were long gone, I realized that my joint pain and headaches not only remained but became more frequent. My physician was not able to find anything wrong and ensured me that "all is well, you are healthy and fit". But I wasn't. Later, I also developed sleep disorders. I would wake up several times during night, increasingly with muscle pain, and in the mornings, I felt as though I had just spent the night working

hard in the yard. I was increasingly plagued by fatigue, so that I scheduled another appointment with my doctor. But again, he was unable to find anything.

Time passed, winter turned into spring and spring into summer. My pain became worse and worse. Additionally, I suffered episodes of racing heartbeat, shortness of breath, abdominal issues, and difficulty concentrating. Days that I really felt well were rare. Another doctor visit resulted in suspicion of mitral valve defect and respective medication. But taking these drugs did not provide any improvement; moreover, I now had severe pain in my hips and lumbar spine, so that I could barely get out of a chair. I returned to my doctor where I underwent exams to rule out suspicion of kidney infection. Blood tests did not confirm this suspicion but indicated possible symptoms of menopause. The culmination of my symptoms was sudden onset of severe neck and shoulder pain that radiated into my right arm and chest. I was at work when I experienced this pain and my coworkers were afraid I was suffering a heart attack. As awful as this pain attack was, it was also the first step in the right direction towards the correct diagnosis of my suffering. My boss organized immediate transfer to the hospital, where I was treated for suspicion of heart infarct. After spending a night in the ICU, I was informed that there were several indicators for fibromyalgia. This suspicion was to be evaluated by a specialist.

However, before I could see a rheumatologist, I suffered such a severe dull headache behind my forehead as well as joint and muscle pain one day that I had to go to the ER of a local hospital. Today I know that what I experienced then is called "fibro fog". This event was a nightmare: although I repeatedly explained that I was experiencing extreme pain, everyone tried to convince me that I suffered from depression. I had to agree to psychological treatment or be

¹ *Fibromyalgia means muscle fiber pain. The causes of this serious chronic disease are so far unknown, and the disease cannot be cured. Typical symptoms include diffuse muscle, joint and back pain, as well as pronounced tenderness. Accompanying symptoms include fatigue, sleep disorders, morning stiffness, as well as difficulty concentrating and lack of motivation. The disease can present itself in many different ways and is very difficult to diagnose.*



The relaxing effect of a sound massage helps to reduce pain.

discharged. Additionally, I was declared disabled and would not be able to resume my professional duties until cleared by the supervising psychologist. The respective treatment did not result in what I had hoped for. I was given a variety of medications. Within two weeks, I was prescribed a colorful cocktail of five different drugs that I should take. But they did not have the desired effect. Instead, they triggered severe side effects.

It is rare that one looks forward to a doctor's appointment, but I was starting to count the days until my visit with the rheumatologist. Just a few days thereafter, I received my diagnosis: fibromyalgia and osteoarthritis in the left leg as well as both wrists.

My treatment begins

My physician was very nice and took the time to answer all my questions. He was honest and said from the very beginning that medication would only have a limited effect on reducing pain. Other factors, like sleep and exercise, would play the greater part. To find out what would work for me and what wouldn't, he recommended I try various non-pharmaceutical activities. He prescribed two additional medications, so that I was by now taking 7 pills a day. Within two months, this cocktail of pills led to two further abdominal issues and an appointment with a gastroenterologist. Like my son, he too said "you need to get off the pills!" But that was easier said than done. I was forced to find physicians who would treat me as a team instead of each individually. It would be three more months before I could assemble such a team. In the meantime, I tried to make do with various therapies like massage, Reiki, and swimming. During this time, I was often so exhausted that I began to doubt that I would ever feel better and return to a normal life. My courage and hope sank more and more and were replaced with anxiety and despair. Additionally, I had to deal with the stigma from colleagues and friends, so that I increasingly withdrew from social activities. I not only felt dejected, but also abandoned.

In October 2007, I finally gained renewed hope. My psychologist referred me to a physician practicing integrative medicine. There was just one catch: I had to cover the cost of this treatment on my own. During my first appointment, it became clear that I suffered from more than fibromyalgia and osteoarthritis, which was later confirmed by blood tests. Suddenly, all my symptoms made sense! I had pronounced gluten and lactose intolerance, as well as intolerance to many chemicals such as the brake dust of train rails that was deposited throughout metro tunnels, and

strong household cleaners. I returned home that day equipped with several pages of instructions. My mission, every day, was to delete items such as bread, pasta, sausage, and anything else with additives from my food list. The goal was to change my household and lifestyle in such a way as to have no more contact with the things that were an irritant to me within four weeks. Simultaneously, I was treated with supplementary magnesium, melatonin and a specialty diet, visited an infrared sauna, and underwent hydrotherapy and colon hydrotherapy. I could add on to this list but it not relevant here.

These treatments made me feel better, but they were so expensive that I had to limit them after six months. There was also an additional hurdle to my improvement: I had gone back to work. But only after a few days of commuting in the bad city air, all the hard-fought successes I had attained over the last few months were eradicated. By mid-March 2008 I'd had enough: I decided to quit.

Two weeks later, I traveled to Germany to visit my sister. She had told me about Peter Hess® Sound Massage a few months ago and was convinced it could help me. I responded to her urging and wanted to now try this method.

Sound enters my life – things are looking up!

When I arrived in Germany, I was totally stressed, exhausted, and plagued by pain. But I was also full of anticipation about the sound massage and couldn't wait to try it. The first treatment through my sister was a wonderful experience for me. From the moment she tapped the first singing bowl and guided it slowly over my body, I felt the soft vibrations that gently flowed through me. When she placed the bowl on my back, I could feel the healing sounds extending deeply within me, how they gently massaged every cell. It was an incredibly soothing sensation. However, what was even more surprising to me was how my body began to relax all on its own within just a few minutes. At first, I felt a certain resistance, but then the relaxation continually expanded. I enjoyed the beautiful humming of the bowls. I tried to follow the sounds and continue to listen to them, but soon I relaxed so deeply that this was no longer possible – I was neither fully awake, nor asleep.

The subsequent night, I slept like a baby. After months of sleep disorders, I could finally fall asleep and remain asleep without medication. Following additional sound massages, other symptoms also improved. I was so convinced of this method that I immediately bought a set of singing bowls and signed up for intensive training in sound massage.

"I had found my sound!"

Equipped with my new singing bowls and a few sound exercises my sister had provided, I returned to the United States. There, I was once again completely dependent on myself. I carried out the exercises and began experimenting with the bowls daily. I developed a small morning and evening ritual with sound which I will discuss further later. August was just around the corner – and so was my intensive training in sound massage in Germany. Despite a fibro flare-up just before my trip, I was determined to do the training. It took a lot of willpower, but I had already mastered that.

The first two days of the seminar I felt relatively well, but then training became increasingly more strenuous for me. You could say that my body was starting to defend itself. I had burning pain from head to toe and could not get up from the floor without assistance. But then, on Thursday night, something special happened: We were sitting on the floor and it was time to get up again. Without thinking about it, I got up all by myself! It wasn't until then that I had noticed – the burning pain was gone. And it stayed away for a long time. This was the moment that I realized that I wanted to introduce this wonderful method to the United States. Not only so others could benefit from it and reduce their level of pain, but also so that I would have someone who could regularly give me a sound massage. Until now, there had only been one solution: to travel to Germany every few months. But, of course, this was only possible on a limited basis.

Self-treatment / treatment with sound massage

I have learned how to effectively apply sound massage to target my specific symptoms. Fibromyalgia presents with complex set of symptoms that express themselves differently in every person. However, many are affected by the following aspects.

Reducing stress

Any kind of stress, whether emotional or mental, worsens fibromyalgia symptoms. It is therefore very important to keep the stress level as low as possible. And what is better suited to that end than a sound massage! Of course, there are other methods such as breathing exercises, meditation, or hypnosis. But from my experience, I can honestly say that nothing puts me in a relaxed state faster or easier than sound. It doesn't have to be a complete sound massage. Here, the saying "less is more" is very applicable. Just 20 to 30 minutes are sufficient, if you do it regularly. So, moderately but regularly.



Photo: Peter Hess® Institute

Especially in stressful life situations, small sound rituals can provide a soothing counterpoint.

Promoting sleep

In my case, sleep disorders were a major problem. During the time I was unable to work, I had to participate in a 6-weeks sleep seminar. Of course, such a seminar may be helpful to many people, but for someone who suffers from chronic pain, it is only a drop in the bucket. Treatment with melatonin, which I took at night before going to sleep and if I awoke during the night, was only a partial solution. Many times I awoke in the morning feeling not at all rested. I found a much easier and effective solution in the previously mentioned sound ritual. It goes like this:

At night, I take my pelvic bowl to bed with me and place it on my abdomen. I tap it until I fall asleep – which generally does not take very long. Should I wake up during the night, I place the bowl on me again until I fall asleep. The singing bowl has become my melatonin substitute.

But even more so than at night, the sounds help me in the mornings. Going to bed all tensed up is one thing but waking up with even more pain is another – but that was precisely the case with me. Today, I always have a singing bowl within reach. Even if I am so stiff that every movement triggers a new wave of pain, I know that just a few minutes of sound will make me feel better again. I had no other solution for this previously.

Improving joint pain

Already in basic sound massage training, simple methods are presented on how to do something good for yourself, for example by placing a universal bowl on your fingertips or palm of our hand and tapping it softly for a few minutes. In various specialty seminars, additional suggestions are presented which, with a little creativity, can be easily modified to your own specific needs so that you can address your symptoms in a targeted manner.

Of course, fibromyalgia differs from rheumatism and it can also burn more intensely, but physical, i.e. muscular, relaxation is an important factor in reducing pain. With regular "self-care", this can be achieved easily. The tension in my neck was so great that I could barely lift my arm and only slightly turn my head. Even though I am not back to 100%, the sounds have helped me so much that I no longer have problems with my arm – and that is great progress for me!

Regulating GI disorders

Many people who have received a sound massage know that even after just a few minutes, the sounds are noticeable in the GI tract. Because the soft sound vibrations also reach our organs and stimulate digestion – and this was also the case for me. Now, instead of undergoing expensive colon



hydrotherapy, I apply my pelvic bowl. This approach is not only more pleasant, but just as effective. Now I don't even have any more issues with gluten and lactose intolerance. Over the course of the years, I also observed that singing bowls can work wonders for a "nervous stomach".

Lifting the fibro fog

Whether the fibro fog is mild or severe, its latent form can drive those affected by fibromyalgia to despair. It leads, for instance, to difficulty concentrating and forgetfulness, so that you ask yourself: "do I have amnesia or something more serious?". For people who were previously mentally fit and dependent on their ability to concentrate and recall information in their profession, this limitation can present a serious threat and lead to depression – as was the case for me. My symptoms were so severe that my physician temporarily prescribed a medication generally given to people

suffering from ADHD. What really helped were singing bowls with a bright, clear tone. Of course, the bowls cannot work miracles and symptoms don't disappear overnight. But they have proven themselves as a real alternative for me and I want to encourage all fibromyalgia sufferers to try them out for themselves. Patience and regular mental training are important additional ingredients.

In conclusion, I want to reiterate that my story is not to be deemed a substitute for medical diagnosis and/or treatment. What I want to accomplish is to encourage fellow sufferers and tell them how sound massage has helped me make life worth living again.

This journey has also given me a new professional purpose in life, because today, I direct the Peter Hess® Academy USA in Texas and teach and provide sound massage to others.



Margit Willems Whitaker

works as a freelance organization development consultant, executive level coach, and Peter Hess® Sound Massage practitioner. Since 2013, she is an accredited trainer in Sound Massage I-IV and Director of the PHA USA/Texas.

She is also an MBTI practitioner and NLP trainer, master hypnotherapist, and Sound of Yoga seminar instructor. In 2014, she developed her own holistic coaching and health concept titled "Four Pillars of Health" in which Peter Hess® Sound Methods forms one of the four pillars.