

## **Health Update: Fibromyalgia**

### **Get Moving? ”**

Fibromyalgia affects 1-3% of the U.S. population. Approximately the same percentage of the population is affected by chronic fatigue syndrome, which is a closely related disease. Up to 18 million adults in any given year report these symptoms, making them a substantial public health problem. Women seem to be more affected than men.

There is typically widespread pain affecting muscles, as well as tendons and ligaments. Scientific studies have shown decreased voluntary muscle strength and endurance in patients with fibromyalgia. One study showed that muscle strength was 35% less in patients with fibromyalgia. This reduction in strength could be one cause of the disease or a secondary effect due to inactivity. Osteoporotic patients with fibromyalgia have impairment in strength of lumbar and abdominal muscles and in measurement of chest expansion.

There are several studies that show benefits of pain reduction and improved aerobic capacity when fibromyalgia patients begin a moderate exercise program. In general, patients are more successful (they stick with it) with low intensity exercises as opposed to high intensity programs. Walking is a good exercise to begin with. Even if pain occurs during the activity, the patient should be encouraged to continue. Inactivity and pain-avoidance behavior is likely to increase symptoms further. Common fears include the fear activity will cause more pain, the fear due to misunderstandings that pain with activity means further damage, or the fear that the pain is a symptom of serious disease. If symptoms increase substantially with the exercise, then the patient should back off of the intensity and do a more gradual approach.

As pain is reduced there is typically also a change in the psychological wellbeing of the individual.

Heavy resistance exercise has also been shown to affect fibromyalgia symptoms. In one study, thirteen elderly women performed a heavy-resistance fatiguing protocol (5 sets of leg presses with 10 repetitions maximum) before and after a 21-week strength-training period. The strength training led to large increases in maximal force and contributed to the improvement in loading performance. The increased strength also seemed to reduce pain in the muscles.

These studies indicate that inactivity is often a problem in fibromyalgia and that getting moving, walking, and even strength training at the gym can have potentially positive impacts on your pain. You should consult a competent health care provider prior to starting any exercise program. This assessment should include a comprehensive spinal and extremity evaluation to make sure there are no joint problems, which could affect your ability to exercise effectively.

### **FIBROMYALGIA?**

**YOU MAYBE A CANDIDATE FOR RELIEF.**

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