



Chronic Pain and Women's Health Newsletter

PAIN 101 (Part 4) - Ways To Decrease Pain



This is the last part in a special 4 part series on pain and will cover things you can do to help pain. The first three parts covered the normal and abnormal pain response and things that make pain worse.

So what can you do if you have pain, especially chronic pain? Most pain can be improved, if not eliminated by addressing several areas.

First, make sure to talk to your physician regarding your specific problems. He or she can order tests to find medical issues or damage such as broken bones or damaged discs. They can also prescribe appropriate medications to help you control your pain, to sleep better, and to heal faster. There may also be appropriate surgical or injection options for your problem

Sometimes over-the-counter medications such as aspirin, acetaminophen,

or ibuprofen can help reduce pain and inflammation. Be sure to discuss use of these with your physician. They are not meant to be used long term, and while mostly safe, still may have side effects such as stomach irritation or interactions with other drugs you are taking.

One of the most important things you can do is find ways to control stress. Relaxation techniques help decrease the body's production of bad pain chemicals and enhance the production of your own pain killing chemicals. These natural substances are

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FIBROMYALGIA

Fibromyalgia is a complicated syndrome with a variety of signs and symptoms. Muscle and joint pain is the primary symptom, but sufferers also experience chronic fatigue, poor sleep, poor bowel function, headaches, and bladder pain.

The disorder affects 3-

6% of the population and is most commonly found in 20 to 50 year old females. Sufferers experience debilitating symptoms that vary from day to day and may last for several years.

To complicate matters, there is no definitive test for fibromyalgia. Diagnosis

is based on a set of classification criteria that include a history of widespread pain for over 3 months and tender points found throughout the body.

There is also no known cause. Some theories in-

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Clemens Physical Therapy PLLC

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- ☺ Better Sleep
- ☺ Chronic Pain Conditions
- ☺ Women's Health Issues
- ☺ Your Questions Answered

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Fibromyalgia cont...

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clude stress, trauma, sleep disturbances, neurotransmitter (brain chemical) abnormalities, viruses such as Epstein-Barr, autoimmune disease, and phosphate build up in cells.

The severe



Fibromyalgia has been linked to a variety of potential causes including brain chemical abnormalities, stress, and sleep disturbances.

nature of the symptoms, combined with the lack of specific tests and an unknown cause, leads to a lot of difficulty in treatment. Common medications may include antidepressants, medicines that increase brain chemical uptake, sleep medications, and anti-seizure drugs. Lyrica, the first FDA approved drug for fibromyalgia, is showing some promising improvements in pain.

Non-drug treatments may also be very helpful. Decreasing stress helps tune down pain and helps

with sleep. Heat and some forms of electrical stimulation can also help decrease tender points. Hands-on treatment such as myofascial release, massage, and stretching can decrease the muscular pain and soreness associated with fibromyalgia to allow for improvement in pain and function.

Exercise is the best supported non-drug treatment found in research (see Research below). However, it is important to do the right amount and kind of exercise. People with fibromyalgia often poorly tolerate exercise that is too aggressive, and should start slowly to build up their tolerance to exercise.

Tips and Tricks: Walking for Exercise

1. Talk to your medical professional before beginning an exercise program.
2. Get comfortable shoes with good arch support. They should also be made of breathable materials and should fit comfortably. You should be able to pinch the material over the toes.
3. Wear comfortable clothes. Walking doesn't require anything fancy. Loose, stretchy clothing is all you need.
4. Pick a place to walk. This can be ANYWHERE! You don't have to have a gym membership or a treadmill to reap the benefits of walking. There are rail-trails, tracks at local schools, or just up and down the roads in your neighborhood. Malls are great places to walk out of the weather.
5. Start slow and try to progress to at least 30 minutes, 3 times a week.
6. Take a friend. Company makes the time more enjoyable and both of you reap the health benefits.
7. KEEP IT UP. The best exercise is one you make a habit. Start walking today for a lifetime of health.

Research: Exercise Helps Fibromyalgia

The Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews looks at the variety of available research on medical treatments. They then publish a recommendation based on the validity of a type of treatment based on quality of research findings. In 2002 they published their findings recommending exercise as a beneficial treatment for fibromyalgia.

After reviewing several research articles, they concluded that supervised aerobic, strength, and flexibility training helped reduce the symptoms of fibromyalgia.

The improvements included better sleep, decreased pain, improved feeling of well being, improved function, and decreased tender points. They also concluded that supervision was important as too much exercise or the wrong type of activity can aggravate symptoms instead of helping.

Overall this is great news. Beneficial exercise is fairly easy to incorporate into a lifestyle. It can be used in conjunction with prescribed medications and does not have any lasting side-effects.



Exercise is a great way to combat the symptoms of Fibromyalgia.

Pain 101 -Ways to Decrease Pain cont...

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free, don't require a prescription, and do not have side effects. Deep breathing is a common way to relax.

Proper exercise is important. While painful conditions benefit greatly from exercise, make sure you are doing things properly. "No pain, no gain" is not the way to exercise when you already have pain. You need to do just the right amount of the right kinds of exercise to benefit. Otherwise you may end up making yourself feel worse. A physical therapist can help you determine the best activities for your individual needs.

There are also things like **Electrical Stimulation or acupuncture/**

acupuncture to help relax muscles, block the pain signals to the brain, and help release the body's natural painkillers.

Manual therapy such as mobilization, myofascial release, massage, and stretching can help greatly with muscular pain. Even people with a lot of pain may be able to tolerate and benefit from the gentler forms of "hands on" treatments.

Don't forget the simple but effective use of either **heat or ice**. Always use ice if you have an acute inflammation (up to 24-

28 hours after an initial injury such as a sprain). After that you may use heat or a combination of ice and heat. Experiment to find the best combination for you.

Overall, there is much that can be done if you have pain. You don't have to just "live with it". Take control of the things you can such as decreasing stressors and learning relaxation techniques. Make sure to seek the help of medical professionals who can help you deal with your specific problems.



Seek the help you need to deal with your pain.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Q: I know that I should exercise but I am in such poor shape and am in so much pain that I can't. What should I do?

A: We have all heard of the huge benefits of exercise. These include weight loss, better sleep, decreased stress, improved mood, and protection against heart disease and diabetes to name a few. We have all heard the recommendations. Both the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports and the American College of Sports Medicine recom-

mend 20-30 min of moderate activity 3-5 x wk. For people who are overweight, severely out of shape or in pain this seems impossible. They feel they can't even walk enough to go grocery shopping so how could they ever follow these guidelines.

It is important to realize that these recommendations are for the average, healthy population. Those who are overweight, in pain, or severely out of shape require special accommodations. However, there is always some type of activity that can be done. The trick is to start with baby steps and **SLOWLY** progress. Also consider that you may never achieve the "recommended" levels of exercise. This is ok!. I often tell people the best form of exercise is the one you will do and do consistently. This means if you are trying too hard and being too tired to function or in too much pain afterwards, you are not likely to keep it up. Go slowly and build up your activity as you can tolerate. That means just walking to the kitchen and back a few times a day may be enough for you. Then as you find that this becomes easier, increase the amount of trips or

the distance you walk. The secret is to be consistent and to listen to your body. You may have some days that are better than others and may have to do more or less activity. Push yourself a little but don't overdo it. You'll find yourself doing more and more before you know it and getting more fit in the process.

There are a variety of activities you can choose from that may be appropriate for you to start with. The best form of exercise is the simple but effective walk. This is easy to customize to your needs, is low impact, and requires no gym membership or equipment other than a pair of supportive shoes. You can walk at home, around the neighborhood, or in the mall in inclement weather. To make it more fun, bring along a friend and chat to pass the time. There are also a variety of other forms of exercise that may strike your fancy that are also more appropriate than jogging or aerobics. Some of these include pool exercises, yoga, and Tai Chi (a form of gentle, graceful, low impact movements). As an added benefit, these types of exercise have been shown to decrease pain and stress.

Remember, it is important for you to talk to your doctor before beginning any exercise program. A physical therapist can design a program specific to your needs to help avoid any problems. Once they give you the green light, start small, progress slowly, and don't give up. The benefits of consistent exercise are worth it!



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Helping People Who Hurt.



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The content of this newsletter is provided for informational purposes only and is not intended to diagnose or suggest treatment for individuals. Please see your health care provider regarding your specific needs.

Fibromyalgia
Chronic Pain
Headaches
Bladder Control
Pelvic Pain
TMJ (Jaw Pain)
Osteoporosis
Biofeedback
Tai Chi, Pilates, Yoga
Manual Therapy