

FIBROMYALGIA & EXERCISE

PUBLIC

WHAT IS FIBROMYALGIA?

Fibromyalgia is a chronic condition that causes pain in the muscles and bones, overall fatigue and tiredness (1). Many who live with fibromyalgia are less physically active than the Australian recommendations. The pain experienced by individuals with fibromyalgia is complex. It is unpleasant and evokes responses both internally and externally from the individual (1). When pain persists, and is chronic, it can become debilitating to your daily life. If you are in pain, you



THE BENEFITS OF EXERCISE

To combat the feeling of pain, we must understand our pain levels and know that it will not cause damage if we move. Our muscles and ligaments love activity, and these tissues are made stronger when exercised (1). The key is to MOVE, with benefits arising from a number of different types of exercise.

How we respond to different types of exercise (e.g., low-impact or high-impact exercises) greatly differs from person to person. There are no forms of exercise that will likely benefit every person with fibromyalgia, just as there is no form of exercise that will have universal negative effects. Therefore, the type(s) of exercise that will provide benefit for an individual is made on a case by case basis and depends on a myriad of factors relating to that individual. This highlights the important role Accredited Exercise Physiologists and Physiotherapists play in working with individuals with fibromyalgia in order to tailor exercise programs specific to them.

Aerobic Exercise

- Why aerobic? Aerobic exercise is now regarded as a standard treatment for fibromyalgia because of its benefits to overall well-being as well as fitness. (4)
- How: The style, type, intensity and duration of your aerobic training must be individualised and is best assessed by an Accredited Exercise Physiologist or Physiotherapist. (4)

Resistance Exercise

- **What are the benefits?** Strength, lowering pain levels, reducing tenderness, greater overall well-being and functionality.
- **How long until you start to see benefits?** At least 6 months until benefits are seen.
- **How should you begin resistance exercises?** First consult a Physiotherapist or Accredited Exercise Physiologist prior to commencing resistance exercise to avoid onset of pain. Using Theraband exercises is highly suitable.
- **How are your exercises best progressed?** Standard gym machines can be used as a progression once familiar with exercise and stronger muscles are developed.

Tai Chi as a form of new therapy

Practicing Tai Chi twice weekly over 12 weeks produces worthwhile benefits in balance, functionality, pain control and severity as well as sleep (3). Tai Chi is also beneficial for muscles to stretch, improving flexibility in a low impact manner (3). The controlled breathing and movements leads to a restful state and mental tranquillity, which improves pain thresholds.

FIBROMYALGIA & EXERCISE

PUBLIC

HOW MUCH EXERCISE IS RECOMMENDED FOR YOU?

- At the start of your program: 2-3 days per week, exercising at 10 minute intervals over the day at a light intensity (2)
- What should you progress to? Gradual progression to 30 minutes of exercise per day over 5-7 days per week, toward a moderate intensity (2).
- Top tips for managing your fibromyalgia symptoms:
 - Listen to your body; reduce intensity when you are experiencing greater and increased levels of pain
 - Understand that pain will not cause further damage
 - Our muscles and ligaments love to move and will feel better after movement
 - When you first commence exercise, be sure to exercise on non-consecutive days, in order to allow the body time to recover and rest.

Accredited Exercise Physiologists and Physiotherapists are qualified and experienced in exercise prescription for those living with chronic conditions. It is recommended to consult one of these Exercise Professionals for an individual assessment and exercise program.



RELATED INFORMATION AND REFERENCES

Exercise is Medicine Australia www.exerciseismedicine.org.au

Exercise Right www.exerciseright.com.au

Find a Physiotherapist www.choose.physio

Find an Accredited Exercise Physiologist www.essa.org.au

Endometriosis Australia <https://www.endometriosisaustralia.org/>

If you have any concerns about the safety of your patient in commencing an exercise program, please consider referral to a Sport and Exercise Physician.

Find a Sport and Exercise Physician www.acsep.org.au/

Prepared by Nadia Levenets

1. Guymer E, Littlejohn G. fibromyalgia. Australian family physician, 2013; 42(10), 690-694. Available from: <https://www.racgp.org.au/afp/2013/october/fibromyalgia/>
2. Sosa-Reina MD, Nunez-Nagy S, Gallego-Izquierdo T, et al. Effectiveness of therapeutic exercise in fibromyalgia syndrome: a systematic review and meta-analysis of randomized clinical trials. BioMed research international, 2017. Available from: <https://www.hindawi.com/journals/bmri/2017/2356346/>. Doi:<https://doi.org/10.1155/2017/2356346>
3. Wang C, Schmid, CH, Rones R, et al. A randomized trial of tai chi for fibromyalgia. New England Journal of Medicine. 2010; 363(8), 743-754. Doi: 10.1056/NEJMoa0912611. Available from: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/20818876/>

4. Carson JW, Carson KM, Jones KD, et al. A pilot randomized controlled trial of the Yoga of Awareness program in the management of fibromyalgia. PAIN®, 2010; 151(2), 530-539. Available from: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/20946990/>. doi:10.1016/j.pain.2010.08.020
5. Ide MR, Laurindo IMM, Rodrigues-Júnior AL, Tanaka C. Effect of aquatic respiratory exercise-based program in patients with fibromyalgia. International Journal of Rheumatic Diseases, 2008; 11(2), 131-140. Available from: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1756-185X.2008.00348.x>. Doi:<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1756-185X.2008.00348.x>.