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"treating the cause of your problem, not just the symptoms"

Aerobic fitness for fibromyalgia

A day doesn't go by in my office that I do not see a patient who has been diagnosed, correctly or incorrectly, with fibromyalgia. Since it is a syndrome consisting of many completely different symptoms, two similar people can experience very different symptoms. One thing that people with fibromyalgia do have in common is that aerobic exercise (and chiropractic care) do seem to help relieve the severity of the symptoms.

In fact, aerobic exercise is considered an essential component of a comprehensive management program for fibromyalgia. In a review of fibromyalgia patients, it was found that more than 80% of the patients were physically "unfit" based on maximal oxygen uptake and the American Heart Association guidelines. Additionally, fatigue fosters inactivity, which in turn leads to deconditioning and enhances a patient's susceptibility to muscle trauma and further muscle pain.

One researcher found fibromyalgia-like symptoms could readily and reversibly be induced in sedentary, normal individuals but not in individuals who were aerobically fit, running 2 to 7 miles per day. This information suggests that improved fitness may be therapeutic.

In a study of 34 fibromyalgia patients randomly assigned to a cardiovascular fitness program or flexibility training program, the cardiovascular fitness group had a 29% increase in cardiovascular fitness and the flexibility group had a 4% decrease. Importantly, the total the cardiovascular group experienced overall improvements as follows:

- Total myalgic score improved by 73%
- Visual analog pain score improved by 23%
- Pain diagram area score improved by 22%

The flexibility-training group, however, improved only 1% to 7% on each score. It is theorized that an aerobic fitness program can be beneficial for fibromyalgia patients by improving slow-wave sleep, stimulating release of endogenous endorphins, improving self-esteem and reducing stress, tension and depression. Exercise is also very valuable because it shifts the locus of control to the individual.

So, now that you know that aerobic exercise can be beneficial, tune in next week when we go over what you can do exercise-wise to reduce your fibromyalgia symptoms.