

Dr. Colin Gage

Nicola Valley Chiropractic
2076A Granite Ave.
P.O. Box 909
Merritt, BC
V1K 1B8

Ph: (250) 378-5456
Fax: (250) 378-8259
Email: info@merrittchiro.com
Website: www.merrittchiro.com

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

More on Exercise and Fibromyalgia

Last week I discussed how fibromyalgia symptoms can be lessened through aerobic exercise. This week we will discuss exactly what I mean by "aerobic exercise" and how you should go about it.

Type of exercise

The type of exercise should be a low impact (no pounding) aerobic program, such as walking, bicycling, water aerobics or swimming. These types of exercise are less stressful on the musculoskeletal system and minimize the risk for undue joint and soft tissue trauma. Additionally, cross training (doing a different type of exercise each day) can minimize monotony. To maintain your interest, join group or community programs and keep a workout diary to document your progress. In general, weight lifting should be avoided, particularly early on, due to the risk of increasing muscle and joint soreness.

A 5 to 10 minute warm up and cool down period of gentle stretching of the active muscle groups is essential to prevent unnecessary injury. Patients should be advised that they may initially experience a flare in their symptoms. Unfortunately, because deconditioned individuals tend to be more susceptible to muscle micro-trauma and exacerbation of pain and stiffness when beginning a new exercise program, many people stop exercising before benefits can be realized. The goal is to maintain a regular, scheduled program.

Frequency of exercise

Fibromyalgia patients should generally exercise 3 to 4 times per week on a regular basis. Exercising less than 3 times per week is not aerobically beneficial, and exercising more than 4 times a week may increase the incidence of minor orthopedic trauma.

Duration of exercise

Each exercise session should be at least 20 minutes long. However, it may be necessary to start out with less, perhaps even 3 to 5 minutes, as tolerated, and build gradually over the ensuing weeks.

Intensity of exercise

Intensity, or how hard to exercise, can be monitored by the percent of one's target heart rate while exercising. The target heart rate is calculated as follows:

-220

-minus one's age

-times 0.7

Thus, a 45 year old person's target heart rate would be $(220-45) \times 0.7$, or 122 beats per minute. However, for most individuals with fibromyalgia, "symptom limited exercise" is probably most appropriate. You should be able to comfortably talk to an exercise partner while exercising without undue stress, shortness of breath, pain or dizziness. Otherwise, you are working too hard. If you are not accustomed to exercising regularly, I would also recommend you talk to your medical doctor before commencing an unsupervised exercise program.

Now you have a general idea of how you should be exercising. Of equal importance is your body weight. If you are overweight, your heart, lungs, muscles, joints, tendons all have more stress on them (all day, every day) than they should. Fibromyalgia or not, you are going to be more deconditioned, stiff, in pain, and less healthy overall. See the local dietician for further info on how to make changes to your diet so that you are able to lose weight wisely, without short-term fad diets.