

Exercising with Fibromyalgia

If you are one of the five million Americans living with fibromyalgia, you may be thinking that exercise is out of the question. After all, your muscles are aching and sore even without working out. In reality, exercise may help relieve some of your symptoms and will provide other benefits as well.

STRETCHING

Stretching daily can be very relaxing and may help reduce muscular pain or soreness. If you've had an active day, end it with a 30-minute stretching routine that may help you relax and even fall asleep. Be sure to stretch all major muscle groups and stretch very gently, to the point of tension but not pain. Hold each stretch for 15 to 30 seconds and repeat each stretch two or three times. Another option may be to participate in a beginning yoga class, which will incorporate strengthening moves with the stretching. Be very cautious and careful not to overdo it.

CARDIOVASCULAR/AEROBIC CONDITION

The key to choosing the "right" aerobic exercise program is choosing the activity you most enjoy. However, your symptoms may limit you to certain activities.

- Water exercise is very popular, but it may be hard to find a pool with a comfortable water temperature. If water exercise is chosen, options include swimming, deep-water exercise and shallow water exercise.
- Walking is another excellent choice because it is low-impact, doesn't require special equipment and can easily be fit into your schedule.
- Many fitness centers offer low-impact aerobic exercise classes and have a variety of low to no impact exercise equipment such as stair-machines, ski-machines and cross-trainers.

When feeling up to it, try doing aerobic exercise at least three days per week (no more than five is necessary) for approximately 30 minutes at a moderate intensity. Exercising at higher intensities may feel fine during the workout, but may leave you with intense muscle soreness within a few hours.

MUSCULAR STRENGTH AND ENDURANCE

Muscle strength, endurance and toning can be done with a number of different types of exercises. Push-ups and curl-ups, using rubber tubing or bands while doing calisthenics, using dumbbells or barbells, or specialized equipment will all result in improving muscular strength and/or endurance. Visit SportWell to learn appropriate technique for any of these methods. Also, no matter which method you choose, begin with a low-dose such as one set of up to ten or twelve repetitions using the major muscle groups, and repeating this two or three non-consecutive days per week. Just as with the aerobic exercise, it is important to begin with low intensity and progress very gradually to moderate intensity. High intensity and high volume (increasing to two or three sets and increasing the repetitions beyond twelve) is not necessary and will likely result in more intense muscle soreness.

THINGS TO REMEMBER

You will respond to exercise differently than anyone else, so pay attention to your symptoms and adjust your exercise routine as necessary. At least one day per week should be designated as a rest day. You may always have pain or soreness, but hopefully the regular, consistent exercise will help you cope with the discomfort and enjoy other aspects of your life!