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Physical Therapy and Fibromyalgia

Fibromyalgia is a health condition characterized most commonly by chronic widespread muscular pain and tenderness, symptoms of fatigue, waking unrefreshed, and thinking and memory problems.

People with fibromyalgia may also have other symptoms such as:

- Difficulty sleeping
- Morning stiffness
- Headache
- Irritable Bowel or Bladder Syndrome
- Pain/ cramps in abdomen or pelvis
- History of depression and anxiety
- Temporomandibular pain
- Numbness or tingling

Diagnosis

The cause of fibromyalgia is unknown but is thought to be due to changes in how the nervous system processes pain. It may be associated with a triggering factor such as trauma, arthritis or an emotional stressor.

Since there are no blood tests, x-rays or muscle biopsies that can be used to diagnose fibromyalgia, it is important to work closely with your health care providers to obtain an accurate diagnosis. Before a diagnosis of fibromyalgia is made, it is important to have a thorough medical examination to rule out other health conditions which may cause similar symptoms, such as rheumatologic or infectious disease, Lyme disease, hypothyroidism, metabolic disease or side effects due to medication.

Fibromyalgia affects an estimated 5 million people in the United States and is much more common in women than men, usually affecting adults between the ages of 30 to 50. Individuals with a rheumatologic disease such as rheumatoid arthritis, systemic lupus erythematosus (lupus) or ankylosing spondylitis are more likely to develop fibromyalgia.

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How a Physical Therapist Can Help

Managing fibromyalgia can be challenging due to daily variation of painful symptoms, deconditioning, and the impact of other related symptoms. Research has shown that exercise is an important part of managing fibromyalgia; yet fear of pain often keeps people from beginning an exercise program. A physical therapist can help an individual learn to interpret pain signals and manage and decrease symptoms through exercise. As an expert in restoring and improving motion in people's lives, a physical therapist will consider all of these factors when developing an individualized plan of care.

A physical therapist can also provide tips to help develop self care skills and pain management strategies. Self care skills are essential for promoting good general health and include maintaining a healthy lifestyle, managing stress, eating a healthy diet, and improving sleep habits.

Importance of Exercise

Regular moderate exercise is an important part of managing fibromyalgia. Recent studies have indicated that reducing body mass index can reduce the risk of fibromyalgia. Aerobic conditioning, aquatic exercise, stretching, strengthening, yoga, tai chi, deep breathing, recreational activities and manual therapy/or modalities for pain relief have been shown to decrease pain and improve function, general physical health, and sleep, in individuals with fibromyalgia. Each person with fibromyalgia will have a different response to exercise and their physical therapist can help develop an individualized plan that will help manage pain and fatigue while improving the overall level of fitness.

Find a physical therapist in your area at www.moveforwardpt.com

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