



AdvaCare Clinics: Fibromyalgia Symptom Relief from Physical Therapy

Fibromyalgia is a chronic condition characterized by chronic widespread pain and allodynia, a heightened and painful response to pressure. Fibromyalgia symptoms are not restricted to pain, leading to the use of the alternative term fibromyalgia syndrome for the condition.

Other symptoms include debilitating fatigue, sleep disturbance, and joint stiffness. Some patients may also report difficulty with swallowing, bowel and bladder abnormalities, numbness and tingling, and cognitive dysfunction, (known as “fibrofog”), which may be characterized by impaired concentration, problems with short and long-term memory, short-term memory consolidation, impaired speed of performance, inability to multi-task, cognitive overload, and diminished attention span. Fibromyalgia is often associated with anxiety and depressive symptoms.

Fibromyalgia Syndrome, an incurable, invisible, and extremely painful disease of the muscle, afflicts an estimated 11 million Americans. It is a disabling condition more common than rheumatoid arthritis, epilepsy and multiple sclerosis. Up to 90% of persons with the disorder are women, but it also occurs in men and children of all age and ethnic groups.

Millions of Americans live in the limbo of not understanding their mysterious persistent pain symptoms. Consider these statistics:

- Currently, Fibromyalgia is so under-diagnosed that most people live with their symptoms for an average of five years before they get an accurate diagnosis of Fibromyalgia.
- Research shows that 92% of Fibromyalgia sufferers have talked about their symptoms with their doctor. But this discussion leads to diagnosis **only 24% of the time**

Fibromyalgia is thought to be the result of overactive nerves that cause chronic widespread muscle pain. Although Fibromyalgia is not just “in the head,” it is still important to understand that the condition is stressful—especially when it goes undiagnosed. Stress can also make Fibromyalgia worse.

Physical Therapy for Fibromyalgia

In some cases, doctors may refer people with FM to a physical therapist, either to design an exercise program or to treat particularly painful flares. Physical therapists employ several techniques. For example, in “spray and stretch,” a physical therapist sprays the sore region with ethyl chloride to anesthetize it before stretching the patient’s muscles.

While there is no known cure for fibromyalgia, physical therapy may help ease the symptoms of pain. It can also help reduce stiffness and fatigue. In addition to exercise, physical therapists use a wide range of resources – from deep tissue massage to ice and heat packs for hydrotherapy. With these tools, physical therapists can help people with fibromyalgia use their muscles, stretch for flexibility, and move their joints through range-of-motion exercises.

The benefit of physical therapy is that it allows a person with fibromyalgia to work closely with a trained professional who can design a fibromyalgia-specific treatment program. The therapist documents your progress and gauges whether you're practicing good therapy habits, alignments, and movement patterns when doing "homework" or exercises at home.

The ultimate goal of physical therapy is for you to learn the specific exercises and then do them daily at home.

Hydrotherapy works well for almost all types of pain, including fibromyalgia pain. Cold compresses may reduce the pain of an injury, such as a sprain or strain. Moist heat may give relief to fibromyalgia's chronic muscle pain or trigger point pain. You may use a moist heating pad, a warm, damp towel, or a hydrocollator pack. You can also stand or sit on a stool in the shower and let warm water hit the painful area on your body.

Your physical therapist may recommend that you use moist heat for a few minutes just before and after stretching or doing resistance or aerobic exercise. Doing so will make the exercise less painful and more effective. If you want to use moist heat to decrease fibromyalgia pain, you might try it twice daily, about 15 minutes each time. Some people with fibromyalgia prefer alternating the ice compresses with the moist heat to get the most benefit.

The physical therapist may use different types of tools with fibromyalgia patients including:

- Deep tissue massage
- Low-impact aerobic conditioning (water aerobics)
- Pain relief exercise
- Stretching and strengthening exercises
- TENS units (transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation)
- Ultrasound

It's important to know that no one technique offers 100 percent pain relief, but by combining techniques, people may substantially lower the intensity of their pain, while improving sleep, mobility and quality of life.

If you suffer from any of these symptoms, don't wait any longer. Our goal is to provide you with the most up-to-date treatment options and recommendations for management of fibromyalgia.

Contact AdvaCare Clinics today at 952-835-6653.