

EXERCISE

by Margy Squires



Our bodies are meant for motion. Blood pulses through our vessels, air through our lungs, food goes in, wastes come out. Being sedentary, then, goes against our very nature. So what happens when the natural flow of movement is slowed or stopped entirely by trauma or disease? Like Humpty Dumpty after the fall, every one tried to put the pieces back together again. Well, we know from the famous nursery rhyme, it didn't happen for Humpty. Many people with pain, fatigue and muscle weakness feel that they can't be "as good as new again" either and end up living fragments of their former lives.

Is It for You?

Whether you have fibromyalgia pain, chronic fatigue, muscle weakness due to multiple sclerosis or other physically limiting conditions, the majority of the research suggests that you can and should exercise in order to reduce symptoms and keep yourself from getting functionally worse. The benefits, researchers say, will be improved mood, increased aerobic capacity and mobility, as well as greater overall well-being. Some even say you will have less pain. About now, you're wishing by some magic that you could change places with these researchers and they could exercise just once in your body, right?

Perhaps making the decision about whether you should exercise will be easier once you've heard from these "experts"—people who have fibromyalgia and chronic fatigue themselves, and those who help rehabilitate FMS and other painful conditions.

What Kind of Exercise?

According to physical therapist, Darice Putterman, just start moving. You can do simple, basic and gentle range of motion (ROM) of every single joint under the limits of pain on a daily basis. Increase the ROM in frequency and the number of repetitions gradually each week until you are able to begin a very simple, basic and gentle exercise program. Simple programs would be pool exercises, Pilates, yoga and tai chi.

Physician and fibro survivor Mark Pellegrino, M. D. frequently recommends water. "Aquatic exercises are beneficial even for someone who cannot swim. In water, most of the body weight is buoyed so the gravity stress on the muscles and joints is reduced. The water needs to be kept at a comfortable temperature, usually around 90° F. Range of motion, flexibility, strengthening, and aerobic exercise can all be done in the pool and can initially be supervised by a trained professional until individuals feel comfortable with following through on their own."

Mary Essert, aquatics instructor for FMS, agrees. Besides easing joints, water immersion relaxes muscles and decreases the hypersensitivity of skin sensors on pain. She cautions, "Each person with FMS is different. Although similarities in patients exist—pain, fatigue and disappointment at their inability to perform the way they used to—therapists need to treat each person individually."

Physician and author Jacob Teitelbaum, M.D., who has ME/CFS, recommends walking during the initial stages of recovery. He explains: "Wait until 6-8 weeks into your [nutritional] treatment regimen. Then begin at your current level of exercise or start taking a 5 minute walk each day. You can increase the walk by 3 minutes every 3-7 days as you are able—that is, if you feel 'good

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Exercise: Is it For You?

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tired' after the exercise and better the next day...if you feel 'bad tired' and wiped out the next day, you did too much. If this happens, don't work out for a few days, decrease the workout by 15-20%, and move up more slowly. Remember the idea of no pain, no gain is stupid!"

Start Small, Increase Gradually

The worst thing you can do is too much too soon, especially if it's been a while since you've done any kind of exercise. Fibro-author Gayle Backstrom learned by experience. "I worked up to 3 repetitions of some stretching exercises and 4 minutes on the bicycle. One day I decided that I would increase my repetitions and increase the time on the bike to 10 minutes. That night I was in a lot of pain. As a result, I had to return almost to the beginning stages of my therapy. Be reasonable in your expectations for progress."

Since you're starting with small steps, you will not see a difference immediately. One of the exercise caveats from *Taking Charge of Fibromyalgia*: "It can take as long as 3-6 months to see improvement. Remember that FMS people are not as predictable in their responses so it is important not to measure yourself against others". Co-author Rosalie Devonshire has fibro herself. Other tips include keeping a diary so you won't forget what you did the day before (hmm, fibro-fog?) and do too much.

Author Miryam Williamson says you'll feel better if you exercise regularly. She admits that most of her adult life up until 1990, she didn't move if she didn't have to due to sciatica pain. Her decision to start stretching and using a stationery bike came before her diagnosis of FMS and paid off in lifting her mood and reducing her achiness. Miryam writes, "Many of us are caught up in the modern quest for a quick fix, a pill that will make everything better right away. But with FMS, there is no such thing and hoping that a quick cure will appear detracts from the possibility of helping ourselves achieve a better quality of life."

Make a contract with yourself, advises Devan Starlanyl, by specifying when, how much and how often you'll do a specific exercise. But don't overdo it, she warns. Exercise with a friend. Use a timer. Most importantly, listen to your own body and respect your limits. You'll feel your best and have a more enjoyable experience if you do.

The Next Step

There's no doubt that exercise benefits the whole body by improving blood flow and oxygenation. Exercise stimulates and activates vital organs, including the digestive tract. Muscles become more soft and flexible, joints less stiff. Exercise lifts the mood, relieves depression and anxiety, and facilitates sleep. Finally, exercise improves physical stamina and endurance while increasing your energy and vitality. Maybe your physical limitations require special considerations in the areas of nutrition, body mechanics and will take more

time. But the only person who can take the next step is YOU. Unlike Humpty, you can get it "back together again".

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Resources

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Expert Exercise Tips

DO's

1. Check RBC magnesium and vitamin D3 blood levels.
2. Start moving more.
3. Do range of motion exercises daily, only to the level of pain.
4. Get professional training in the beginning, one who will treat you as an individual.
5. Start low, increase gradually.
6. Take a day off if you need it.
7. Be reasonable in your expectations.
8. Allow time to note improvements.
9. Make a contract with yourself (what, when, how often to exercise).
10. Keep a diary of what you've accomplished.
11. Exercise with a friend.
12. Use a timer to limit sessions.
13. Listen to your own body. Respect your limits.

DON'T

1. Do too much too soon.
2. Compare yourself with others.
3. Try to do what you "used to do".
4. Look for a quick fix.
5. Quit.

