

Being Active with Fibromyalgia

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Experts now say that any physical activity counts toward overall health – even just a few

minutes. Even though physical activity can be challenging for those with fibromyalgia, you may feel better, move better or sleep better. It's important to keep at it!

People with fibromyalgia live with symptoms that can fluctuate from day to day and even within the same day. Regular exercise may decrease fibromyalgia symptoms of pain, stiffness, anxiety, fatigue and depression. Being active can also improve your fitness, boost your mood and help you do more during the day! Studies show that there are many ways for people with fibromyalgia to benefit from physical activity: participate in land- or water-based programs, focus on one type of training (aerobic or strength training), or do a combination of activities (aerobic, strength training and flexibility).

Everyone is different, so you'll need to adjust your program based on your symptoms and how you respond to exercise. Discover the kinds of physical activities that fit your lifestyle!



Getting Started

Start Small

If you have trouble working up the energy or motivation to exercise, find an activity you'll enjoy and set small, realistic goals. Begin with short periods (like 5 or 10 minutes). Gradually progress. It all adds up.

Know your Body and Symptoms

Find opportunities to be active throughout your day, especially at times of the day when your symptoms are less. If your symptoms increase during the activity, give yourself permission to go a little easier for the same amount of time.

Keep it Simple

Try to sit less and move more! You can improve your overall health by decreasing the time you spend sitting or lying. Walk to the mailbox. Walk the dog. Dance in the kitchen. Take the stairs. Small increases in regular physical activity count.

Be Active with Others

Join a fibromyalgia exercise group or be active with a friend. The extra support may help you stay active. And don't forget to make it fun!

Fibromyalgia Tips and Cautions

For the first days or weeks of a new activity program your symptoms (pain, tiredness, stiffness) may increase until your body gets used to exercise. Keep at it – start low and go slow! Increase your active time and then increase your pace. Keep track of symptoms that are getting in the way of exercise.

Work up to a pace that you can do without undue pain or flaring of symptoms; go harder when you can, back off if you need to. If symptoms increase during or after exercise, go at an easier pace the next time.

Fine tune your program to what feels best for you. Do high or low temperatures affect your symptoms? Are short bouts better than longer ones? Do you do better being active in water or on land? Are there times during the day that your symptoms are less bothersome?

During symptom flare-ups, don't completely stop your exercise and daily physical activity. Try to keep moving, using day-to-day activities like walking or stair climbing. Aim to move for the same length of time but at a lower intensity. A little something is better than nothing!

To stay safe and injury free:

- Start with light effort.
- Warm up and cool down before and after exercise. End exercise sessions with deep breathing exercises and relaxation techniques.
- Set realistic short- and long-term physical activity goals that fit your life!

Aerobic Activity

During aerobic activity your heart and lungs work harder which will improve your health over time. Build up gradually to doing at least 150 minutes/week of moderate-intensity activity (like light cycling, walking, water exercise).

What?

Any low-impact rhythmic, continuous activity

How often?

Start with 1-2 days/week. Build up to 2-3 days/week.

How hard?

Begin very light. Build to fairly light to somewhat hard.

How much?

Start with 5-10 minutes. Gradually build up to 30-60 total minutes over the day.

Remember: Fit in 10, 15 or 30 minutes whenever you can. It all adds up!

Aerobic Activity Tips and Cautions

- Be aware of your body and pace yourself.
- Drink plenty of fluids before, during, and after exercise.

Try gentle activity in a cool to warm water pool that feels comfortable to you (below 97°F or 36°C). Do flexibility exercises and slow to fast leg and arm movements in waist-to-shoulder deep water.

Strength Training

Strength training can make daily activities like lifting grocery bags or yard work easier and safer. It may also improve some fibromyalgia symptoms such as pain, fatigue and stiffness.

What?

Hand/cuff weights, resistance bands, weight machines, calisthenics or your own body (for example, kitchen counter push-ups or chair sit-to-stands).

How often?

2-3 days/week
*2 rest days in between

How hard?

Start fairly light to somewhat hard.
Build up to somewhat hard to hard.
Muscle endurance: Very light to fairly light.

How much?

Start with 4-5 repetitions. Build up to 8-12 repetitions (for each major muscle group). Gradually build up to 2-4 sets. Muscle endurance: 15-20 repetitions. Build up to 2 sets.

Strength Training Tips and Cautions

- Alternate exercises between different parts of the body to allow for enough recovery time between exercises.
- Avoid straining or holding your breath when lifting

Other Types of Physical Activity

Flexibility

Stretch a muscle to the point of feeling tightness for 10-30 seconds. In addition, move your joints through a pain-free range as much as you can.

Mixed Exercise Programs

Combine aerobic, strength and flexibility exercises in each session or within each week. You can do this on land or in a warm water pool to improve symptoms and keep in shape.

Yoga and TaiChi

These can slightly improve symptoms of fibromyalgia. They also help with balance, flexibility and strength, and are relaxing too.

Dance

Forms of dance like belly dancing, Dance Movement Therapy, aerobic dance, Zumba and Biodanza can help you express your artistic self while exercising. Fine tune to what works best for you.

Remember: If you need it, get help from a physical therapist or certified exercise professional. They can teach you the right way to do exercises, how to breathe properly and keep you motivated. The right technique is particularly important for those with fibromyalgia.

More Help

National Fibromyalgia Association at [fmaware.org/new-home-page](https://www.fmaware.org/new-home-page)

NfmCPA - National Fibromyalgia and Chronic Pain Association at [fmcpaware.org](https://www.fmcpaware.org)

Fibromyalgia Coalition International at [fibrocoalition.org](https://www.fibrocoalition.org)

Go to [acsm.org/get-stay-certified/find-a-pro](https://www.acsm.org/get-stay-certified/find-a-pro) to find an ACSM certified exercise professional near you.

How will I get started **this week?** _____

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