
Fitness Tips

by Cari Draft Elliott, BS, CPT - ACE-Certified Personal Trainer

How can I exercise with chronic pain?

***Question:** I've continuously gained weight since I've been diagnosed with fibromyalgia two years ago. My doctor tells me to get more exercise to lose the weight, but how can I do this when I am in constant pain?*

Answer: It's a catch-22... pain specialists recommend that you get moving, since long periods of rest or low activity are harmful to the body. Yet people in pain are able to do less and less, and their lives become dominated by physical inactivity. When you rest too much, your pain increases. What to do?

You need to talk to your doctor about what type of activities they recommend. It's important to start slowly, and build gradually so that you feel better and not worse. Be proactive and become an expert on your pain. Work with a physical therapist or your doctor to determine which movements should be avoided and which are good for you. To safely increase your activity level, you must be confident that the activity is not hurting you -- when you know certain movements are good for you, you will be able to tolerate a little bit of pain, knowing that the activity is going to make the pain go away. If a new pain begins, go back to your doctor or physical therapist to determine the cause; in some cases you might need to use the trial-and-error method to find the right movements that work for your situation.

Do you enjoy water exercises and have access to a pool? Can you use weights or resistance bands either at home or as part of a group class? Or do you like to walk outside, maybe with walking poles? You need to figure out what works best for you, because if you like the activity you will be more likely to stick with it long enough to help you improve your pain situation. Keep records of your activity and be patient.

Adding exercise into your routine is going to be difficult at first, but it will be well worth the effort as you take charge of your situation and make the most of your abilities!

Cari Draft Elliott is an ACE-Certified Personal Trainer who makes "house calls" and is also the owner of EcoTrek Fitness! Please check out www.oneononefitgirl.com and email your questions to cari@oneononefitgirl.com.
