



# Exercising with Fibromyalgia

## Every move counts

Move more and reduce your sedentary time each day by incorporating different types of movement. It is never too late to start, some is always better than none!

## How to get started

Regular exercise, such as walking, together with simple strength and stretch exercises such as tai chi are effective at improving your physical, emotional and social function and key symptoms such as pain, fatigue, anxiety and depression. Regular exercise also significantly reduces your risks of heart disease, some cancers, stroke, hypertension, obesity, type 2 diabetes and osteoporosis. It helps to improve your overall health, the quality of your sleep and ability to do daily activities, such as household chores and leisure activities with friends and family.

You can improve your health with fibromyalgia by choosing an exercise plan that starts off gradually and helps you build up your ability to exercise for longer without getting fatigued and over-tired. Simple strength exercises may help to improve your muscle strength and your mobility to enjoy the activities of daily living. Getting regular exercise can also help control your weight, which is important to reducing the pain of fibromyalgia and weight gain associated with prolonged inactivity.

**Take all medicines as recommended by your doctor or pharmacist.**

## Warm up and cool down

**Always start your exercise session with a 10–15-minute warm up to loosen up the muscles and raise the heart rate safely.** Warm-up exercises include dynamic stretches, range-of-motion activities and low intensity movements. This can be done standing up, walking around, marching on the spot or seated.

**Always end your exercise session with a 10–15-minute cool-down to ensure your heart rate and breathing rate return to normal safely.** Cool down exercises include slowly decreasing the intensity of your activity and simple stretches.

## Be active

### Some is good, more is better

<b>How hard:</b>	Aim for at least <b>150-300</b> minutes a week of moderate intensity or at least <b>75-150</b> minutes a week of vigorous intensity physical activity. Start moving more each day increasing to regular movement every day and add sessions as your strength and stamina improve.
<b>How hard:</b>	Any movement helps. Aim for moderate to vigorous intensity—aim to get slightly breathless. Take frequent breaks, if necessary.
<b>How long:</b>	Aim to spread out your session throughout the week. If your fitness level is low, start with 5–10-minute sessions and add 10-minute intervals until you can comfortably exercise for longer.

<b>What type:</b>	All physical activity counts. Try activities within your abilities. Try walking, cycling, jogging, dancing, swimming, water aerobics, hiking— choose something you enjoy! Recreational team sports such as basketball, golf, soccer and volleyball are great social activities too! Household activities such as cleaning, gardening, vacuuming or walking your dog are great activities for your health.
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### What will it do for me?

*Regular exercise significantly improves overall health and helps reduce pain, fatigue, depression and anxiety. It will also help you improve your ability to do daily household chores and leisure activities with friends and family.*

## Build strength

<b>How much:</b>	At least twice a week.
<b>How hard:</b>	Start with light muscle strengthening exercises and progress to moderate or greater intensities over time. Take frequent breaks, if necessary.
<b>How long:</b>	Choose a variety of 8–10 exercises targeting the upper and lower body, and repeat each exercise 10–15 times. Aim for 1–3 sets of each exercise.
<b>What type:</b>	A variety of strength exercises using free weights, resistance machines or household items such as a can of beans or a weighted water bottle as a weight. At home, try squats, calf raises, wall push ups, arm curls, knee curls, front arm raises, side arm raise, or chair stands using weights or a household item such as a can. Household chores such as mowing the lawn and gardening are also good strength-building exercises.

### What will it do for me?

*Strengthening exercises help to maintain bone, muscle and joint health.*

## Improve balance

<b>How much:</b>	At least three days a week. Start with one session per week if necessary, and gradually work towards two.
<b>How hard:</b>	Try 2–3 balance exercises and repeat each exercise 10-15 times.
<b>How long:</b>	Hold each balance for 10-30 seconds.
<b>What type:</b>	Try yoga, Tai Chi or home balance exercises such as standing on one foot and a heel-to-toe walk. Always exercise safely when doing balance exercises. If you are at high risk of falling, do seated balance exercises or exercise using a sturdy chair or wall for support.

### What will it do for me?

*Immobility and inactivity in fibromyalgia can increase your risk of osteoporosis and fractures from falls. Practising balance exercises helps to train your body to react more quickly to a loss of balance and can help reduce the risk of falls, fractures and injuries.*



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## Sedentary living

**Reduce the amount of time being sedentary.** Move more and break up sedentary time. Sedentary behavior is defined as time spent sitting or lying with low energy expenditure, while awake in the context of occupational, educational, home and community settings, and travel. Higher amounts of sedentary behavior can increase the risk of heart disease, type 2 diabetes and some cancers.

**Replace sedentary behavior with more physical activity of any intensity (including light intensity).** It is possible to avoid sedentary behaviour and be physically active while sitting or lying, through, for example, upper body led activities, inclusive and/or wheelchair-specific sport and activities. Try seated stretches for those with limited mobility; using active forms of transport; standing while working (within your abilities and environment), and other accessible active options to replace sedentary time.

## Your exercise, your way!

Choose activities that are easy to start with, and that you enjoy. Always exercise within your abilities. If mobility is difficult, adapted cycling, swimming and chair-based exercises may be better alternatives. Exercise with friends and family or join a group class to improve your motivation levels and engage in social activities. Try exercising both indoors and outdoors and see which you prefer! Most importantly: **some physical activity is better than none.**

## Exercise safety

Start with shorter sessions (e.g. 10–15 minutes) and slowly build up to the recommended level.

Aim to get slightly out of breath, but exercise sensibly and stop the activity if you feel unwell.

Always wear comfortable clothing and shoes that give good support. Take frequent breaks if necessary, and drink water before, during and after exercise.

Choose environments that you can access freely and safely. Please ask your healthcare provider or local leisure organizations for advice on the best option for you.

## Helpful Resources

The Fibromyalgia Association Canada provides a list of in person and online support groups for individuals living with Fibromyalgia. <https://fibrocanada.ca/en/resources/fm-support-groups-across-canada/>

The Arthritis Society of Canada has provided resources for living with Fibromyalgia as well as supports and programs. [https://arthritis.ca/about-arthritis/arthritis-types-\(a-z\)/types/fibromyalgia](https://arthritis.ca/about-arthritis/arthritis-types-(a-z)/types/fibromyalgia)

Scan for more physical activity resources!

