

## PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IS AN ESSENTIAL COMPONENT OF YOUR TREATMENT PLAN.



Regular exercise can have so many benefits, both physical and psychological, even when you're living with chronic pain.

Most people who suffer from chronic pain such as back-pain or fibromyalgia, benefit from a more active lifestyle. Exercise is rarely contraindicated in the treatment of most painful conditions; in fact, it can be an important part of the treatment plan. Regular, progressive exercise helps you focus more on the exercise and less on the pain.

### Stay active and enjoy the benefits

Living actively can have a very positive effect on your physical and psychological state. Here are some of the positive effects of exercise:

- Keeps you from losing fitness and muscle mass.
- Increases endurance, flexibility, coordination and balance.
- Improves your sense of well-being by producing endorphins (substances released by the brain which can be as effective as morphine in relieving pain).

- Helps you sleep better.
- Reduces stress and improves your mood.
- Gives you better control over pain intensity.
- Prevents or helps control a variety of diseases and conditions, including diabetes, high cholesterol, hypertension, heart disease, osteoporosis and even some types of cancer.
- Helps you maintain a healthy weight.
- Reduces the feeling of fatigue and increases your tolerance for activity.
- Gives you a sense of inner strength and boosts your self-esteem.
- Combats isolation by maintaining your social connections through exercise and recreation.

It's important to start with something simple. Be aware that a slight increase in pain is normal when you begin an exercise program. Choose specific exercises or activities that can benefit you, and avoid those that might make your pain worse.

If you're not comfortable starting an exercise program on your own, speak to your doctor, your physiotherapist or another health professional (a kinesiologist, for example). A professional can help you choose the appropriate activities for your condition. Many organizations also offer tips, advice and even special programs for specific medical conditions. Here is one to help you get going:

<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/physactiv/index-eng.php>

**Getting your body moving is  
the first step toward physical  
and psychological well-being!**

## It's never too late to start

You may be surprised to learn that it is really not that difficult to become more active. You don't even have to join a gym or take up a particular sport.

There are dozens of little ways to increase your level of activity over the course of an ordinary day. If you've been inactive for several years, it's better to begin moderately and gradually increase the frequency and intensity of physical activity. You'll be more successful if you go slowly and pay attention to your own physical condition rather than start with an overambitious program you won't be able to maintain. Research has shown that even 10-minute exercise sessions – repeated several times a day – can have a significant benefit. The challenge is to keep at it, even if it seems difficult in the beginning.

## How to incorporate exercise into your life

- Find an activity (or activities) you like.
- Set modest, achievable goals.
- Try to add more activity in your ordinary day. For example:
  - At work or at home, take advantage of short breaks to go for a little walk. For extra motivation, get yourself a pedometer to keep track of the number of steps you take in a day. This simple little device allows you to assess your activity level and monitor your progress.
  - Take the stairs instead of the elevator if you're going up or down only a floor or two.
  - When watching television, do some muscle strengthening or stretching exercises during commercial breaks.
- Don't overdo it! Exercise is much more effective when you do it most days as opposed to a few times a month. Irregular, overly intense exercise requires several days of recovery:
  - Use the "10% rule" as your guide: figure out, and start with your base level for an activity (the level at which you feel no increase in pain) and increase the intensity or duration of that activity 10% at a time.
  - On a scale of 0 to 10 (where 0 is no pain and 10 is the worst pain), your pain should not increase by more than 2 points during exercise, and it should return to base level afterwards. For example, if your pain is at 5 before you start exercising, it can go up to 7 during exercise, but should come back to 5 when you're finished. This will help keep you within your limits and capabilities at all times.

- Be patient! You're starting a new way of life and it will take more than a few days for you to notice the benefits of exercise. But don't give up!
- Go easy on yourself. It's OK if you miss a scheduled activity now and then.
- Vary the type of exercise you do to reduce the risk of injury associated with repetition. Variety will also improve your endurance, muscle strength and flexibility.

**You'll be more successful if you go slowly and pay attention to your own physical condition.**

## Different types of exercises:

### **Endurance** (aerobic activity)

- Walking
- Swimming or pool exercises
- Gardening
- Social dancing
- Cycling or adapted cycling

**Objective:** 3 to 5 times a week, 20 to 60 minutes each time

### **Muscle development** (body building)

- Workout routines with light weights
- Stair climbing

**Objective:** Twice a week with 8 to 15 repetitions per exercise

### **Flexibility** (stretching)

### **Proprioception** (balance and coordination)

- Progressive stretching exercises
- Tai-chi
- Specific exercises

**Remember:** Your goal is to improve your health, but you want to have fun, too! Choose activities you enjoy and try exercising with a group or with one or more people you like.