

A regular dip could benefit fibromyalgia sufferers

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Patients suffering from fibromyalgia could benefit significantly from regular exercise in a heated swimming pool, a study published today in the open access journal *Arthritis Research & Therapy* shows. The findings suggest a cost effective way of improving quality of life for patients with this often-debilitating disorder.

Fibromyalgia is a common, painful syndrome, with no known cause and no accepted cure. Symptoms usually involve chronic and severe pain and tenderness in muscles, ligaments and tendons. Pain in the neck and shoulders is common but sufferers also report problems with sleep, anxiety and depression. More than 90 percent of sufferers are female. Physicians usually prescribe painkillers together with exercise and relaxation techniques, but they may also prescribe a low-dose antidepressant.

Now, Narcís Gusi of the Faculty of Sports Sciences, at the University of Extremadura, in Cáceres, Spain and Pablo Tomas-Carus of the Department of Sport and Health at the University of Évora, Portugal have carried out a randomized controlled trial with a group of 33 female fibromyalgia patients to find an alternative approach. Seventeen of the patients took part in supervised training exercises in warm water for an hour three times a week over a period of 8 months while the remaining sixteen did no aquatic training.

Gusi and Tomas-Carus found that this long-term aquatic exercise program was effective in reducing symptoms and improving the health-

related quality of life of the participants. In an earlier study, the researchers had shown that even a short-term exercise regime could reduce symptoms but pain would return once the patients stopped the exercise course.

"The addition of an aquatic exercise programme to the usual care for fibromyalgia in women, is cost-effective in terms of both health care costs and societal costs," the researchers conclude, "appropriate aquatic exercise is a good health investment." The researchers are yet to compare aquatic training with more accessible and cheaper forms of exercise, such as low-impact aerobics, walking, and tai-chi.

Source: BioMed Central

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