

Dangers of Repetitious Exercise with TrPs

by Devin J. Starlanyl

Excerpted from "The Fibromyalgia Advocate: Getting the Support You Need to Cope with Fibromyalgia and Myofascial Pain Syndrome", by Devin J. Starlanyl, © 1998, and Fibromyalgia and Chronic Myofascial Pain: A Survival Manual, ed 2, 2001 © Devin J. Starlanyl and Mary Ellen Copeland, New Harbinger All rights reserved.

Please be aware that we cannot hope to put all the information from ours and several other books for patients on these disorders. Please get additional information from one of these sources. We have listed some in the bibliography.

Exercise can be a great help in relieving symptoms, but any type of bodywork you choose should avoid repetitious exercises (Simons, Travell and Simons 1999, p 109). Avoid activities that produce repetitive muscular loads, such as shoveling snow, raking leaves, vacuum cleaning, painting walls, or unloading a dishwasher. If you must do such tasks, vary your movements. Use both hands. Alternate sides so that muscles on each side of your body are used in turn. The number of repetitions of the movement should not exceed six or seven. Rest your muscles between repetitions to allow them to recover.

Your muscles are supposed to work together in functional units, and they are out of practice. A single muscle by itself can not accomplish anything at all. To function, each muscle requires the interactions of the rest of its muscle group. Your muscles are going to have to learn coordination. If one muscle is not functioning as it should, then all the muscles in that group are not functioning as they should, because other muscles have modified their actions to take up the role of the dysfunctional muscle. Remember, everything in your body is connected through the myofascia, and that myofascia is stiff and unyielding. It will take time to coax your muscles back to healthy functioning.

You cannot strengthened a muscle that has a TrP, because it is already contracted by the TrP, and the TrP inhibits it (Simons, Travell and Simons, 1999). If TrPs are causing pain even when you are resting your muscles, gentle passive stretch and moist heat may be the only type of bodywork you can endure. It is important that your muscles be slowly stretched to their full range of motion often each day. The stretch should be within the limits of pain and should not produce a lasting ache. When an exercise produces only mild soreness which disappears on the first day, the exercise can be repeated on the second day. Tell your bodyworkers the extent and nature the aftereffects of your exercise so that your program can be adjusted accordingly. When the TrPs cause only a mild soreness that disappears quickly, gradual lengthening exercises can be added to the daily program. Avoid or greatly modify activities with repetitious movement,

such as vacuuming or raking leaves.

You must be out of pain with normal range of motion for two weeks before strengthening exercise is initiated, and then it must be gentle and introduced very gradually. Janet Travell spoke these words frequently. When you can perform 10 lengthening contractions easily, this daily exercise can be replaced with 1 muscle shortening contraction. Holding a muscle in maximal contraction for 5 to 10 seconds daily will maintain the strength of the muscle. One additional repetition may be added each day if the exercise soreness disappears that day. Exercise must be prescribed carefully and monitored closely.