

Scientific Study

Lack of Balance in Fibromyalgia

“Peripheral and central mechanisms of postural control may be affected in fibromyalgia.”



When it comes to bad balance and frequent falls, we tend to think of the frail and elderly as being at the highest risk. However, new research shows that patients with fibromyalgia have significantly impaired balance and increased fall frequency.

Researchers at Oregon Health and Science University believe that peripheral and central mechanisms of postural control may be affected in fibromyalgia.

Fibromyalgia is a disease process characterized by chronic widespread musculoskeletal pain, non-restorative sleep, fatigue, headache, morning stiffness, poor memory, difficulty concentrating, paresthesias (numbness and tingling) and overall impaired functioning in both social and occupational settings. The severity of the pain is typically more constant than other forms of pain and may come and go rapidly, move around to various parts of the body, and worsen with touch.

Fibromyalgia is the 2nd most common disorder seen by rheumatologists, affecting roughly 2% of the population of the United States. Middle aged women are afflicted at a higher rate, with a prevalence of 3.4% for women, and 0.5% for men.

The study subjects were aware of their balance problems in this study.

There are several recommendations which may help to maintain and improve balance.

Examine your Medications

Some medications may increase dizziness or reduce blood pressure. Certain medications may interact with one another to create additional effects. Be sure your doctor knows all the medications and supplements you take and ask about any suspect medications.

Exercise

Both regular exercise and balance specific exercises may be helpful. Before beginning any exercise program, check with you a doctor. Weight training will help improve muscle strength, which can improve balance. Tai chi, yoga, Pilates, and dance are all fun ways to work on balance, strength, and flexibility while improving core strength for postural stability. Specific exercises may help with balance, such as practicing walking on a line heel to toe forwards and then backwards.

Think Ahead

If you know that your balance is not good or suffer from dizziness and/or orthostatic hypotension, take a look around your home for obstacles which may cause a fall. Arrange furniture to leave plenty of floor space for walking, keep the stairs clean, locate the bedroom on the ground floor to avoid the stairs, check for sharp objects which could cause injury in a fall, avoid area rugs which may be a tripping hazard, and install no-slip grip strips or no skid mats in the bathroom and kitchen.

Reference

Jones KD, Horak FB, Winters-Stone K, Irvine JM, Bennett RM. Fibromyalgia Is Associated With Impaired Balance and Falls. *J Clin Rheumatol.* 2008 Dec 19.