Nondrug Pain and Symptom Management

EXERCISE

EXERCISE – any activity that requires physical effort. Regular exercise can help improve health, fitness, and physical function as well as reduce chronic pain.

How Does It Work?

- Exercise improves strength, flexibility, endurance, and overall physical function allowing patients to perform tasks and participate in activities with less effort.
- Exercise activates inhibitory pathways in the central nervous system, which inhibit nociceptive activity and provide analgesia.
- Exercise alters the immune system by reducing the release of inflammatory cytokines and increasing the release of anti-inflammatory cytokines.
- Exercise can also reduce stress, depression, and anxiety.

There are different types of exercise, such as aerobic, strengthening, and stretching exercise.

- Aerobic - exercises that raises heart rate and breathing rate. This type of exercise improves patients’ endurance and reduces pain.
  - Examples: walking, cycling, running, swimming, gardening
- Strengthening - exercises that build muscle strength, reduce pain, and improve function. This type of exercise improves patients’ ability to perform tasks and participate in activities.
  - Examples: weight lifting, resistance bands, hiking
- Stretching - exercises that help with mobility, movement, and pain.
  - Examples: yoga, tai chi, Pilates

What you can do:

- Instruct patients on the benefits of exercise for overall health as well as chronic pain management.
- Describe the types of exercises and their benefits and provide examples for each type.
- Discuss options with patients for engaging in regular exercise (i.e. home exercises, access to fitness facilities, frequency, duration, fitness tracking, goal setting).
- Encourage patients to incrementally increase their activity. Patients should aim to exercise at moderate intensity for the best effects. They should be able to talk while exercising but not sing.
- Provide patients with useful resources on how to begin an exercise program. The following links include educational resources for patients, such as tips for starting an exercise program, frequently asked questions, and strengthening and stretching exercise videos and pictures:
  - [https://uihc.org/health-topics/exercise-treat-chronic-pain](https://uihc.org/health-topics/exercise-treat-chronic-pain)
  - [https://uihc.org/sites/default/files/exercises_for_chronic_pain.pdf](https://uihc.org/sites/default/files/exercises_for_chronic_pain.pdf)

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Revised 4/2019