

## Living With Pain Isn't Living

Zachary Dunkle DPT, OCS, CPPS

Are you one of the 100 million people who suffer from chronic pain lasting greater than 6 months? If you are, you likely have tried numerous medications and treatments. The bulk of these treatments frequently focus on prescription opioid-based pain medication. One holistic option commonly overlooked is physical therapy and exercise. Introducing a regular exercise program can have dramatic impacts on your condition and overall wellbeing. In fact, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention just published new guidelines recommending physical therapy and exercise as the preferred initial treatment for managing chronic pain.



Now, I don't recommend immediately going out and signing up for a Gold's Gym or LA Fitness membership and starting your first month with hour long sessions 6 days a week. The best course would be to have an evaluation from a physical therapist skilled in managing chronic conditions. An expert in this field can expertly diagnose contributing factors and precisely tailor a treatment plan specifically to you. I have found this critical because as a physical therapist, I can employ specific strategies such as dry needling to immediately reduce your discomfort. Following this treatment with targeted exercises will further facilitate and cement these changes. As you progress through PT and are able to enjoy activities instead of just suffering through them because of pain, I encourage you to find a fitness activity that speaks to you; Implement a walking program, join a yoga class, or become a member of a fitness facility. If the fitness facility has a pool for you to

use, I recommend you take advantage of the amenity; this low impact option will allow you to perform all land-based exercises with minimal to no pain.



In addition to beginning an exercise routine, another strategy to employ is to simply change how you think about pain. For instance, instead of focusing on what you can't do because of the pain, focus on what you can do and try to improve upon that each week. It is important to note that pain is more of a warning system than one that indicates severity of damage. An example of this is when you have a broken bone; the pain is severe until it is set in the cast, then the pain is minimal. The bone is still fractured, just as it was prior to being placed in the cast.