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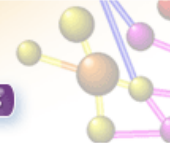
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Medscape Medical News from the:

American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) 57th Annual Meeting

This coverage was developed in cooperation with the American College of Sports Medicine.

From Medscape Medical News

Laser Therapy May Improve Outcomes in Fibromyalgia

Jennifer Monti

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June 8, 2010 (Baltimore, Maryland) — New data presented here at the American College of Sports Medicine 57th Annual Meeting suggest that the application of class 4 infrared light lasers to fibromyalgia trigger points improves upper body flexibility. This finding is important, investigators noted, because fibromyalgia is often difficult to treat with pharmacologic agents, and patients seek alternative regimens to ease their discomfort.

Kristen Williams, a student at the College of Human Sciences, Florida State University in Tallahassee, presented data on the impact of infrared light therapy on pain, fibromyalgia impact, and function in women diagnosed with fibromyalgia. In all, 39 women (52 ± 11 years of age) were randomly assigned to receive 8 minutes of laser therapy or sham heat therapy twice per week for 4 weeks. Treatment consisted of the application of laser therapy or sham heat therapy to 8 standardized points located across the neck, shoulders, and low back.

The impact of laser therapy on upper body flexibility in patients treated with laser therapy was significant, compared with those treated with sham heat therapy. However, there was no improvement in functionality or pain score between the 2 groups. There was an increase in the amount of time between bouts of severe pain in laser-treated patients, compared with sham-treated patients.

These findings are important because patients with fibromyalgia often seek out some form of alternative therapy, like heat or light therapy, to ease their symptoms. Ms. Williams pointed out that 91% of individuals with fibromyalgia use some form of alternative medicine, compared with 42% of the general population. However, the strength of lasers that are used for therapy is widely variable, and there have not been well-designed and documented clinical trials to support the claim that these therapies are beneficial and should be recommended to the larger community.

Ms. Williams noted that "these findings are beginning to bring some coherence to the field of laser therapy for fibromyalgia. We know that there are myriad benefits of laser therapy on tissue — we can accelerate growth and repair of tissue, reduce fibrous tissue formation and inflammation, and reduce trigger point relief. The next steps in this field are to really narrow in on the dosing, treatment scheduling, and clinical end points that indicate success in treating this condition."

Erik Russell, MD, a meeting attendee and primary care physician in Glen Burnie, Maryland, noted that "this research is important because we often struggle to come up with good treatment plans for patients suffering from chronic nonspecific complaints like fibromyalgia. We welcome any evidence that these newer modalities are actually helpful. We hear through the grapevine they may be helpful, but blinded studies really help us feel comfortable recommending these types of therapies."

Future studies in this area are likely to focus on reducing pain and increasing the amount of time between painful episodes. The merger of a stronger understanding of the biologic basis for fibromyalgia and the impact of laser therapies on those targets might lead to a suite of personalized therapies to reduce the functional impact of fibromyalgia, Dr. Russell said.

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—Ms. Williams and Dr. Russell have disclosed no relevant financial relationships.

American College of Sports Medicine (ACSM) 57th Annual Meeting: Abstract 1081. Presented June 3, 2010.

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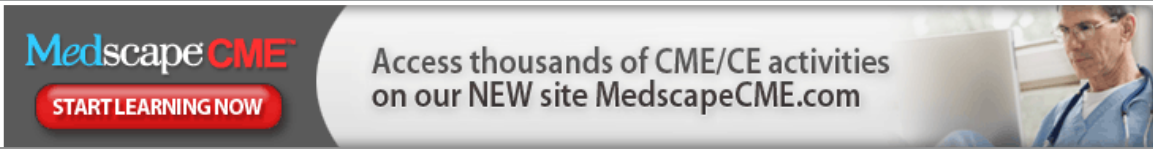
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