

The Wellness Express

Jump on the train to good health



Issue 4, September 2010

Pain Can Affect Women Differently Than Men

Presented by:

“Pain is such an uncomfortable feeling that even a tiny amount of it is enough to ruin every enjoyment,” said writer and performer Will Rogers. It’s certainly one of the most common health afflictions as your chiropractor knows from helping people in pain every day.

According to the American Pain Foundation, 42% of people age 20 years and over reported pain that lasted for more than a year. Lower back pain is the biggest cause followed by migraines, neck pain and facial pain.¹

Pain is a complex thing. There are many things that come into play with pain - whether acute or chronic - including physical, neurological and genetic factors.

As well, pain can affect men and women differently.

Up until the mid-1990s there wasn’t much research focusing on pain differences between men and women. But new research reveals how it affects each sex. As it turns out, women are more sensitive to pain and at additional risk to experience several pain conditions at the same time. These result in higher chances of disability.

Chronic pain conditions are more common in women than men. Females more often suffer from migraines, temporomandibular disorder (TMJD), irritable bowel syndrome, and fibromyalgia.

It was once thought that women had higher rates of pain than men because women were more likely to seek medical attention. But recent research actually shows that numerous medical conditions where pain is a key symptom affect women more frequently than men. For example, up to 90% of fibromyalgia sufferers are female.²

One long-term study showed women were more prone to have musculoskeletal pain and to suffer from more intense pain than men.³ Chronic pain among elderly women was cited by the researchers as a major health issue that needed to be addressed.

Men are more apt to suffer from low mood following a particularly painful day. A study reported “high levels of anxiety are associated with increased pain severity among men but not women with primarily musculoskeletal pain.”⁴

Exercise of the Week

Calf Stretch, Variation 4

Difficulty: Easy

(Consult your chiropractor before doing this or any other exercise.)

Start: Standing on a stable box, or a step. Use handrails or a wall for balance.

Exercise: Place one foot behind you so heel of that foot extends past edge of box/step. Lean into back foot, allowing heel to drop below height of box/step. Keep knee straight to focus on gastrocnemius muscle, or bend knee to focus on soleus muscle. Hold for 30-60 seconds. Switch sides and repeat 2X per side.



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Other research indicates women tend to use emotionally centered strategies, which seem to offer a better way to cope with consistent pain. Neurological tests of men experiencing pain showed more activity in the cognitive/analytical parts of the brain and women experiencing the same pain stimulus showed more action in the emotionally centered limbic system.

Some health conditions that affect both men and women will become more common at different stages of life. For example, osteoarthritis is a wide-spread condition that causes joint degeneration. Pain is one of its most common and distressing symptoms. In men, osteoarthritis usually occurs before age ^{4,5}. For women, it's more likely to happen after they're 55 years old. In one osteoarthritis study, women reported much higher levels of both pain and disability compared to men suffering from this condition.⁵ An Australian study found the occurrence of neck pain decreased as a woman aged. But in men, neck pain was most likely to peak between 40 to 59 years of age.⁶

Influence of Hormones

What other factors are responsible for women feeling pain more intensely and more often than men? Nerve differences and hormones may be guilty of ramping up pain in females.

Facial soreness is one of the most common types of chronic pain. Research on nerves revealed women have double the amount of nerve receptors per square centimeter of facial skin compared to men.

Perhaps one of the biggest influencers on pain felt by women is hormones, especially estrogen. As a female travels from childhood through adolescence, pain becomes more common at rate much higher than males. The menstrual cycle impacts pain and its level of intensity. Women suffer more often than men with TMJ disorder (pain in the jaw area) and report more pain with this condition during their premenstrual/menses phase.

Conversely, many pregnant women see their levels of pain-killing endorphin hormones actually rise to help deal with the pain of childbirth.

Estrogen also influences serotonin - a neurotransmitter involved in processing pain signals. Male and female spinal cords show differences in serotonin identification and how it routes information. The result can cause women to feel pain at a lower threshold than men.

Biological differences in men and women may also impact pain relief medications, with some being more effective for one sex compared to the other.



Fortunately, chiropractic can help relieve pain caused by some of the most common health conditions, including migraines, back soreness, arthritis, TMJ disorder and muscle/joint problems. Regular adjustments from your chiropractor also keep your nervous system healthy by reducing subluxations. Reduce the impact of pain in your life and boost your overall health by seeing your chiropractor on a consistent basis.

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Quote of the Week

"The patient should be made to understand that he or she must take charge of his own life. Don't take your body to the doctor as if he were a repair shop."

- Quentin Regestein

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This newsletter is written and designed by Mediadoc™ exclusively for its chiropractic clients.

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