

Influence of Physical Therapy in Rheumatoid Arthritis

By Reumatol Clin

Rheumatoid arthritis (RA) is an autoimmune disease that causes a chronic inflammation in the synovial membranes of multiple joints in the body. It attacks the lining of the joints and often produces severe pain and inflammation, joint disfigurement, and loss of joint movement and function. Extra-articular involvement including rheumatoid nodules, vasculitis, eye inflammation, neurologic dysfunction, cardiopulmonary disease, lymphadenopathy, and splenomegaly are manifestations of the disease. Although the usual disease course is chronic, some patients will spontaneously enter a remission.

Physical therapy (or physiotherapy), often abbreviated PT, is a health care profession. Physical therapy is concerned with identifying and maximizing quality of life and movement potential within the spheres of promotion, prevention, treatment/intervention, habilitation and rehabilitation. This encompasses physical, psychological, emotional, and social well being. PT management commonly includes prescription of or assistance with specific exercises, manual therapy, education, manipulation and other interventions. In addition, PTs work with individuals to prevent the loss of mobility before it occurs by developing fitness and wellness-oriented programs for healthier and more active lifestyles, providing services to individuals and populations to develop, maintain and restore maximum movement and functional ability throughout the lifespan.

The objective of a recent study was to evaluate the effectiveness of physical therapy on stiffness, pain and quality of life in patients with rheumatoid arthritis. The researchers recruited 29 individuals diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis and randomized them into 2 groups: a treatment group and a control group. The treatment group received 1 or 2 sessions per week of physical therapy for six months. The results were statistically significant in decreased morning stiffness and pain in the treatment group compared to the control group but increased in physical problems and social function. The authors wrote "The study cannot conclude the effectiveness of physiotherapy in the treatment of rheumatoid arthritis although the results show a decrease of morning stiffness and pain and increased CVRS, which is clinically interesting."¹

1 De Dios Sancho EP, Martin-Nogueras AM. Influence of the physical therapy on the health and quality of life of the rheumatic patient. *Reumatol Clin*. Aug2011;7(4):224-9.