

Myofascial Pain

Condition: Myofascial pain or myofascial pain syndrome (MPS) is a medical term used to describe muscle pain and stiffness and can occasionally be associated with weakness and sensory changes. This condition can be accurately and reliably diagnosed and treated by a PM&R Physician.

Background: MPS can be either acute or chronic in nature. It can affect a single or group of muscles and often develops as a result of overuse or injury. MPS is estimated to affect nearly 9 million people in the U.S. with the vast majority of those affected having chronic pain. It is thought to be one of the primary causes of pain in those seeking medical attention.

Risk Factors: Many different activities and medical conditions may place individuals at greater risk for developing myofascial pain. Activities that may cause MPS include unaccustomed or intense exercise, muscle overuse or repetitive physical work, poor posture, and poorly designed workstations. Medical conditions that may cause MPS include underlying joint problems, sleep disturbance, anxiety, and fatigue in addition to some vitamin and hormone abnormalities.

History and Symptoms: MPS usually presents as pain, often described as stiffness or tightness, in a particular muscular area. Symptoms can start suddenly or develop more slowly over time. Pain is usually made worse with movement and can be associated with a single or multiple "trigger points," which are tender areas in muscle that cause pain when overstimulated. Although pain is often the primary complaint, some people may develop other symptoms such as tiredness or depression.

Physical Exam: During the exam, your health care provider will check your range of motion and look at the painful area. He or she may apply gentle pressure to the area to assess for tight muscle bands or "trigger points," which may cause some discomfort. Your provider may check your strength and sensation in addition to attempting to reproduce your pain with various positions or maneuvers.

Diagnostic Process: A Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation (PM&R) physician has the ability to accurately diagnose myofascial pain after a careful history and examination. The PM&R physician may opt to obtain additional labs or imaging, but this is not typically needed. If you are diagnosed with myofascial pain, your physician will be able to guide you through the various treatment options available.

Rehab Management: The mainstay of treatment includes stretching, physical therapy, generous use of ice and heat, topical or oral pain relievers, and occasionally injection of medicine into the painful area. Your PM&R Physician may also advise you on how to correct your posture, adjust your activity, and avoid overusing certain muscles until your condition improves.

Other Resources for Patients and Families: The National Institute of Health's Division of Occupational Health & Safety offers [tips on how to make a workplace ergonomically friendly](#). The section on computer placement and usage can benefit both workers and non-workers alike.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is PM&R?

Physical medicine and rehabilitation (PM&R), also known as physiatry, is a primary medical specialty that aims to enhance and restore functional ability and improve quality of life to those with injuries, physical impairments or disabilities affecting the brain, spinal cord, nerves, bones, joints, ligaments, muscles and tendons. PM&R physicians, known as physiatrists, evaluate and treat the whole body, maximize patients' independence in their daily life and are experts in designing comprehensive, patient-centered treatment plans to empower patients to achieve their goals. By taking the whole body into account, they can accurately pin-point problems, decrease pain, assist in recovery from devastating injuries and maximize overall outcomes and performance with non-surgical and peri-surgical options. To learn more, visit www.aapmr.org/aboutpmr.

What makes PM&R physicians unique?

PM&R physicians' training focuses not just on treating medical conditions, but on enhancing the patient's performance and quality of life in the context of those medical conditions. They focus not only on one part of the body, but instead on the development of a comprehensive program for putting the pieces of a person's life back together – medically, socially, emotionally and vocationally – after injury or disease. PM&R physicians make and manage medical diagnoses, design a treatment plan and prescribe the therapies that physical therapists or other allied therapists perform or that are carried out by the patients themselves. By providing an appropriate treatment plan, PM&R physicians help patients stay as active as possible at any age. Their broad medical expertise allows them to treat disabling conditions throughout a person's lifetime.

Why see a PM&R physician?

A PM&R physician will thoroughly assess your condition, needs, and expectations and rule out any serious medical illnesses to develop a treatment plan. By understanding your condition and goals, you and your PM&R physician can develop a treatment plan suited to your unique needs.

How do I find a PM&R physician near me?

Visit www.aapmr.org/findapmrphysician or contact your primary care physician for a referral.