The effectiveness of aquatic physical therapy in the treatment of fibromyalgia: a systematic review with meta-analysis.


Abstract

Objective: To assess the effectiveness of aquatic physical therapy in the treatment of fibromyalgia.

Data sources: The search strategy was undertaken using the following databases, from 1950 to December 2012: MEDLINE, EMBASE, CINAHL, LILACS, SCIELO, WEB OF SCIENCE, SCOPUS, SPORTDiscus, Cochrane Library Controlled Trials Register, Cochrane Disease Group Trials Register, PEDro and DARE.

Review methods: The studies were separated into groups: Group I - aquatic physical therapy × no treatment, Group II - aquatic physical therapy × land-based exercises and Group III - aquatic physical therapy × other treatments.

Results: Seventy-two abstracts were found, 27 of which met the inclusion criteria. For the functional ability (Fibromyalgia Impact Questionnaire), three studies were considered with a treatment time of more than 20 weeks and a mean difference (MD) of -1.35 [-2.04; -0.67], P = 0.0001 was found in favour of the aquatic physical therapy group versus no treatment. The same results were identified for stiffness and the 6-minute walk test where two studies were pooled with an MD of -1.58 [-2.58; -0.58], P = 0.002 and 43.5 (metres) [3.8; 83.2], P = 0.03, respectively.

Conclusion: Three meta-analyses showed statistically significant results in favour of the aquatic physical therapy (Fibromyalgia Impact Questionnaire, stiffness and the 6-minute walk test) during a period of longer than 20 weeks. Due to the low methodological rigor, the results were insufficient to demonstrate statistical and clinical differences in most of the outcomes.