Physical Therapy for Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome

In the medical field there is an old saying, "when you hear hoof beats think horses, not zebras" - this cautions medical practitioners to look for the most common and therefore most likely diagnosis. This is why individuals with Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome (EDS) identify with a zebra-print awareness ribbon - they are the zebras! EDS was once thought to be extremely rare and even still isn’t diagnosed that often. However, the U.S National Library of Medicine now believes that as many as 1 in 5,000 individuals worldwide may have some form of EDS.

Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome is an inherited condition that affects the collagen and connective tissues in your body. There are six major types of Ehlers-Danlos syndrome but all of these types share the symptom of hypermobility. Hypermobility is an unusually large range of movement in the joints. Some people may notice only slightly increased flexibility while others may be wheelchair-bound.

Pain is very common in EDS due to the joints moving in ways that they shouldn’t. Chronic pain can lead to fatigue, depression, withdrawal from social activities, and general deconditioning. Once a person with EDS has become deconditioned, even their nerves can become sensitive and suddenly things that were not painful before become extremely painful.

There is no cure for EDS. People with EDS need to take care to protect their joints while still participating in their basic daily tasks and social activities. Most research and medical organizations agree that physical therapy is the cornerstone of treatment for people with EDS. A physical therapist who is familiar with the diagnosis can work with the patient to safely strengthen muscles, train posture, protect joints, and help maintain lifelong function.

So what do I do as a physical therapist treating EDS? At Penn Therapy & Fitness Rittenhouse, I work with patients to develop safe and effective exercise programs to regain strength and build confidence in the ability to move! By focusing on a particular type of muscle fiber, we can give the body the stability it needs to carry them through the day. We focus on joint and body position awareness, learning how to listen to the important body signals while gently telling the stressed out nerves to
At Penn Therapy & Fitness Rittenhouse, I am working to make Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome less of a mystery in the physical therapy world! I want to be part of the patient’s team - helping those zebras find understanding in a world that is listening for horses, while keeping them motivated to exercise and move!

For more information and excellent resources regarding Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome, please visit The Ehlers Danlos Society at http://ehlers-danlos.com/.

Want to learn more about how physical therapy can help you take charge of your EDS? Contact Penn Therapy & Fitness Rittenhouse at 215-893-2500 to learn more about getting started.

**About the Blogger:**

Corey Woldenberg, PT, DPT received her Doctorate of Physical Therapy from Washington University in St. Louis in 2010. She has experience in acute and outpatient physical therapy in orthopedics, neurology, cardiology, trauma, transplant, oncology and general medical-surgical care. Corey currently treats patients at Penn Therapy & Fitness Rittenhouse. She also specializes in treating patients with Ehlers-Danlos Syndrome (EDS).