

Foods That Chronic Pain Sufferers Need to Avoid

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Chronic pain is a pervasive issue and fibromyalgia is a very common form. It is a chronic condition whose symptoms include muscle and tissue pain, fatigue, depression, and sleep disturbances.

Recent data suggests that central sensitization, in which neurons in your spinal cord become sensitized by inflammation or cell damage, may be involved in the way fibromyalgia sufferers process pain.

Certain chemicals in the foods you eat may trigger the release of neurotransmitters that heighten this sensitivity.

Although there have been only a handful of studies on diet and fibromyalgia, the following eating rules can't hurt, and may help, when dealing with chronic pain.

Limit Sugar as Much as Possible. Increased insulin levels will typically dramatically worsen pain. So you will want to limit all sugars and this would typically include fresh fruit juices. Whole fresh fruit is the preferred method for consuming fruit products.

If you are overweight, have high blood pressure, high cholesterol or diabetes, you will also want to limit grains as much as possible as they are metabolized very similarly to sugars. This would also include organic unprocessed grains. Wheat and gluten grains are the top ones to avoid.

Eat fresh foods. Eating a diet of fresh foods, devoid of preservatives and additives, may ease symptoms triggered by coexisting conditions such as irritable bowel syndrome (IBS).

It's also a good idea to buy organic food when possible, as it's best to avoid pesticides and chemicals. However, fresh is best. So if you have to choose between local, fresh, non-organic and organic but wilting – go with fresh, and clean properly.

Avoid caffeine. Fibromyalgia is believed to be linked to an imbalance of brain chemicals that control mood, and it is often linked with inadequate sleep and fatigue. The temptation is to artificially and temporarily eliminate feelings of fatigue with stimulants like caffeine, but this approach does more harm than good in the long run. Though caffeine provides an initial boost of energy, it is no substitute for sleep, and is likely to keep you awake.

Try avoiding nightshade vegetables. Nightshade vegetables like tomatoes, potatoes, and eggplant may trigger arthritis and pain conditions in some people.

Be Careful with Your Fats. Animal based omega-3 fats like DHA and EPA have been touted as a heart-healthy food, and they may help with pain, as well. They can help reduce inflammation and improve brain function. At the same time, you want to eliminate all trans fat and fried foods, as these will promote inflammation.

Use yeast sparingly. Consuming yeast may also contribute to the growth of yeast fungus, which can contribute to pain.

Avoid pasteurized dairy. Many fibromyalgia sufferers have trouble digesting milk and dairy products. However, many find that raw dairy products, especially from grass fed organic sources, are well tolerated.

Cut down on carbs. About 90 percent of fibromyalgia patients have low adrenal functioning, which affects metabolism of carbohydrates and may lead to hypoglycemia.

Avoid aspartame. The artificial sweetener found in some diet sodas and many sugar-free sweets is part of a chemical group called excitotoxins, which activate neurons that can increase your sensitivity to pain.

Avoid additives. Food additives such as monosodium glutamate (MSG) often cause trouble for pain patients. MSG is an excitatory neurotransmitter that may stimulate pain receptors; glutamate levels in spinal fluid have been shown to correlate with pain levels in fibromyalgia patients.

Stay away from junk food. Limit or eliminate fast food, candy, and vending-machine products. In addition to contributing to weight gain and the development of unhealthy eating habits, these diet-wreckers may also irritate your muscles, disrupt your sleep, and compromise your immune system.

Sources:

» [Health.com 2008](#)

» [Health.com 2007](#)

» [National Fibromyalgia Association](#)

Dr. Mercola's Comments:

Chances are good that someone in your family or your circle of friends has fibromyalgia. Fibromyalgia affects 10 million Americans, which is 2% to 4% of the population. Alongside diabetes and heart disease, it has become one of the most pervasive 21st Century diseases.

If you have fibromyalgia, then you already know how frustrating it is to manage, and how confusing it is to sort through all the conflicting nutritional advice about how to eat.

The fact is, there's little scientific evidence to support any single eating plan that will work for all fibromyalgia sufferers.

You've probably read:

- Eat more whole grains. Then, avoid grains altogether.

- Eat fruit of all kinds. Then, some fruit increases pain.
- Eat fresh, organic tomatoes. Followed by, tomatoes and other nightshade vegetables will make you feel worse.

Confused yet about how to stock your refrigerator?

The problem is that fibromyalgia is a complex array of symptoms involving widespread pain and fatigue and has multiple causative factors. No one treatment is effective for everyone.

Kent Holtorf, MD, the medical director of the Holtorf Medical Group Center for Endocrine, Neurological and Infection Related Illness in Torrance, California states:

“We’re at the point now where we know diet plays a role in this disease—it’s just not the same diet for everybody. And not everybody is helped in the same way.”^[1]

Fibromyalgia requires an approach that is as diverse as the disease.

So, if you have fibromyalgia, you aren’t that different from everyone else in terms of your nutritional needs. Your diet must be tailored to your own genetic composition.

So, where do you start?

Nutritional Typing a Crucial Step for Fibromyalgia

The best starting point is determining what [nutritional type](#) you are, so that you will know how your body reacts to food. I have condensed my [nutrition plan](#) into an easy to follow eating plan that progresses in three stages, from beginner to advanced.

Nutritional Typing is not a diet. It is a way to determine which of three basic groups you fit into: Protein Type, Carb Type, or Mixed Type.

I have found that eating this way seems to help decrease or eliminate fibromyalgia symptoms. However, it is also clear that eating in accordance with your nutritional type alone is not the complete answer to symptom relief.

My Dietary Ten Commandments

Although there is no “one-size-fits-all” diet, there are dietary guidelines that I consider absolute—fibromyalgia or otherwise.

1. Avoid artificial sweeteners. [Aspartame](#), in particular, has been known to trigger fibromyalgia-type symptoms, and if you have the disease already, it will only make it worse. Artificial sweeteners could be responsible for part or even all of your symptoms. (You can read more about this in my book [Sweet Deception](#).)
2. Eat a varied diet of fresh, organic, whole foods that are as close to their natural state as possible. Whole fruits and vegetables are rich in antioxidants, which have anti-

inflammatory properties[iii]. The more colorful your produce, the better! Go for those deep oranges, reds, purples and greens.

3. Eat as many raw foods (“living foods”) as possible for their enzymes and [biophotons](#). I try to eat at least 80 percent of my food raw. Cooking food to above 118 degrees F destroys enzymes and reduces nutrient uptake.
4. Drink plenty of [pure, filtered water that is fluoride-free](#).
5. Avoid all additives, preservatives, and processed foods.
6. Avoid [sugar](#) and caffeine, including sodas, fruit juices and [energy drinks](#).
7. Eliminate or strictly limit alcohol consumption.
8. Make sure you are eating enough long-chain animal based [omega 3 fatty acids](#) from fish or krill oils. Omega 3s decrease inflammation, joint pain, swelling and stiffness and are natural pain reducers, in addition to providing many other health benefits.
9. [Coconut](#) and coconut oil have been found to be beneficial to people with fibromyalgia, chronic fatigue syndrome, and hypothyroidism.
10. [Eat slowly](#) and fully chew and enjoy your food!

Detecting Food Sensitivities

If you are already following these dietary guidelines and want to delve deeper into what foods might be increasing your symptoms, then the next step is *refining* your dietary plan, within your nutritional type category.

There is some evidence that people with fibromyalgia experience fewer symptoms if they eliminate one or more foods that are the most common triggers for [food allergies or food sensitivities](#).

Sensitization refers to a gradual change in how your immune system reacts to a particular substance, often resulting in an allergy.

In “central sensitization,” your entire central nervous system becomes sensitized to a substance, and this happens to be one of the proposed mechanisms for fibromyalgia and chronic fatigue syndrome, in terms of how your body amplifies pain signals[iii].

Fibromyalgia sufferers are particularly vulnerable to becoming centrally sensitized to certain foods, causing an immune reaction that exacerbates their symptoms.

The most common things in your diet that will cause a problem are corn, wheat, soy, dairy, citrus and sugar. The top three worst offenders are pasteurized milk, soy and gluten (wheat and other grains).

In [one study of 17 fibromyalgia patients](#), nearly half experienced a “significant reduction in pain” after eliminating corn, wheat, dairy, citrus and sugar.

Other Important Factors to Remember

Here is a checklist of the most significant ones you might need to address:

- [Sleep disruption](#) is almost always a significant problem with fibromyalgia.
- [Exercise](#) is known to ease the pain of fibromyalgia and is an extremely important aspect of your daily routine. In one study by Harvard researchers, after exercising for 20 weeks, women with fibromyalgia reported improved muscle strength and endurance, and lessening of their symptoms including pain, stiffness, fatigue and depression.
- In my experience, nearly all fibromyalgia sufferers have some form of underlying stress or emotional component that contributes to their condition. My favorite tool to resolve this is [meridian tapping technique \(MTT\)](#) (also referred to as EFT).
- Check your [vitamin D](#) levels. Some of the new research on vitamin D shows that low vitamin D can worsen fibromyalgia, among other things. It has also been shown that [sunlight is a natural painkiller](#).

All it takes to feel better is a little willingness to make a few lifestyle changes, and perhaps explore some alternatives to what you've been doing.

You can't ever predict which little change is going to be the heavy hitter—so you might have to go through a little trial and error. But when you do find it, a little tweak can be a game changer!

References:

[i] Bouchez C, "[Fibromyalgia: The Diet Connection](#)," WebMD

[ii] Rawlings D. "[Proper Foods to Eat for Fibromyalgia](#)," Fibromyalgia Cures

[iii] Mayo Clinic staff, "[Fibromyalgia Causes](#)" (2009) Mayo Clinic,

Related Links:

» [Fibromyalgia and Chronic Fatigue: Is Yeast the Missing Link?](#)

» [Fibromyalgia, Lyrica, and the New York Times](#)

» [Don't Be Fooled: You Can't Cure Fibromyalgia With a Pill](#)