

Seven Simple Strategies To Combat Fibromyalgia

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Strategy #1: Sugar

Fibromyalgia sufferers can benefit from eliminating sugar from the diet.

Glucose is the sugar that our bodies use for fuel and must be maintained at specific levels.

Normally, we convert carbohydrates into glucose and additional glucose is stored in the liver. The liver can quickly convert compounds into proper glucose for energy as needed.

Today, refined carbohydrates are a normal part of the “Western diet.” Carbohydrates are stripped of their natural packaging so that the resultant, unnatural sugar hits our bloodstreams like a bomb.

This sugar overload affects the pancreas and adrenal glands, slows digestion and taxes the liver. It robs us of vital nutrients, ends up as fatty deposits in the organs and compromises the immune system.

Candida albicans

Yeast, or candida albicans, is a microbe present in all of us. The overabundance of sugar in our diets has contributed to its overgrowth.

The yeast colonies or fungal branches reach through the digestive lining to rob us of nutrients and contribute to leaky gut syndrome.

Yeast thrives on sugar and many sugar cravings are really those of the yeast itself!

Artificial Sweeteners

Monosodium glutamate (MSG), aspartame, saccharine and sucralose are food additives that generate free radicals and worsen fibromyalgic symptoms. These artificial sweeteners might not add calories (directly,) but they keep our sugar addiction alive and heighten pain. They damage nerve cells and hyper-sensitize pain receptors and pathways.

Many people have now become aware of the dangers of MSG and try to avoid ingesting it. FDA regulations, however, allow MSG to be used in the processing of other ingredients (present in autolyzed yeast, hydrolyzed protein and whey protein) and to be listed under the “natural flavoring” caption.

To avoid health issues associated with sugar:

- Replace refined sugar, artificial sweeteners, dextrose, fructose, sucrose and corn syrup with raw honey, molasses, and Rapadura, Stevia and malted grain syrups.
- Substitute whole fruit for fruit juice, lemon water for sugary sodas, whole grain and fresh vegetables for processed carbohydrates, white flour, white rice, and processed pastas.

The sugar habit may be a hard habit to break but becoming sugar-free is well worth your while. Focus on *adding* a healthy choice everyday rather than “losing” a sugar choice and you will gradually and naturally purge your body of sugar. You will see improvement in a whole host of symptoms.

Strategy #2: Dairy

Food allergies, sensitivities and intolerances are very common in those who suffer from fibromyalgia. Food sensitivities affect every biological process so the symptoms are diverse and wide-ranging.

The most common food allergens are nuts, citrus, gluten, soy, food additives, egg whites and pasteurized milk.

Leaky gut syndrome is also common in fibromyalgia sufferers. The cells that line the digestive tract normally create a selective barrier to the bloodstream. In a leaky gut, these cells become inflamed and irritated. This allows substances that would normally be blocked to pass through the lining, causing further aggravation and immune system response.

Casein is a large milk and egg-white protein that can pass through the intestinal lining and cause immune reaction.

Not everyone that is sensitive to dairy has problems with butter. Those that do can often use ghee—clarified butter. Heating butter causes dairy proteins to separate from the rest of the butter.

Ghee is great if you are lactose intolerant or have dairy sensitivity. Those that suffer from true dairy allergy, however, cannot use butter or ghee.

The process of pasteurization destroys many nutrients, enzymes and probiotic bacteria that would normally help us to digest milk better. Pasteurized milk is not a good source of vitamin D or calcium. Instead, it is linked to many diseases and disorders connected with deficiencies of vitamin D and calcium.

Milk is not the only source of vitamin D however. Sunlight allows us to synthesize vitamin D and the best food sources are fish and fish liver oils. Beef liver and mushrooms contain small amounts of vitamin D.

Alternate sources of calcium include:

- Beans: Baked beans, Great Northern, Navy beans, white beans, winged beans, and yellow beans all have over 100 mg of calcium per cup.
- Fish: A can of sardines contains 317 milligrams of calcium.
- Figs: 10 dried figs hold 269 mg of calcium.
- Flour: A cup of carob flour contains 359 mg of calcium and a cup of amaranth 300 mg.
- Greens: Chicory greens, collard greens, dandelion, kale, mustard and turnip greens are high in bioavailable calcium. A cup of Lambsquarter greens has a whopping 464 milligrams of calcium.
- Herbs: 1 tablespoon of basil contains 185 milligrams.
- Other vegetables: Bok Choy, Chinese broccoli, French beans, kelp, okra, rutabaga, seaweed, squashes and sweet potatoes are other great sources of calcium.

Vitamin D and calcium work in concert in ways that are not fully understood. Vitamin D deficiency can contribute to the severity of chronic pain and muscle weakness. Get your calcium and vitamin D in natural forms and this delicate balancing act can provide relief for fibromyalgic symptoms.

Strategy #3: Soy

Soy is another potential food allergen that fibromyalgia sufferers would do well to avoid.

We tend to think of soy as a healthy alternative to animal proteins and dairy products. Unfortunately, due to its overuse as a binding agent and thickener in countless foods, soy is becoming a common allergen and a source of food sensitivity.

Soy (also known as soya, soybean and glycine max,) can pass through the intestinal lining and cause disruptions just as casein does. It is also a source of phytoestrogens: which are endocrine disruptors.

Soybean is a highly subsidized crop. Industrial farming of soy includes the use of pesticides and herbicides. There are often heavy metals in the soil of these farms and genetic engineering of the seeds is common practice.

Unfermented soy contains enzyme inhibitors and phytates that can block the digestion and absorption of nutrients. Unfermented soy is also *lacking* in calcium and causes vitamin D deficiency.

Asian cultures consume soy that has been fermented for 6 months to 3 years. The fermentation process breaks down many of the harmful compounds in soy and makes its nutrients more bioavailable.

Soy lurks behind ingredient labels such as:

- Hydrolyzed vegetable starch
- Lecithin
- Monodiglyceride
- Textured Vegetable Protein (TVP)
- Vegetable oil

There are plenty other sources of protein and calcium that are safer alternatives for you if you suffer from fibromyalgia.

Strategy #4: Gluten

Gluten intolerance is becoming more common in the US. Gluten is a sticky protein found in wheat, rye and barley.

Gluten can aggravate leaky gut syndrome and add immune system reactions to the issues fibromyalgia sufferers already endure. It also reduces ability to absorb nutrients from food.

Wheat is another subsidized and over-utilized agricultural crop. Overexposure to wheat gluten is due to diets high in refined grains such as breads and pastas made with white flour, less than 100% whole grain wheat flours and other processed grains. Americans are subject to gluten as a binding agent and thickener in a vast array of processed foods.

Celiac disease is gluten intolerance at its worst. Italians have a high rate of celiac disease due to the preponderance of breads and pasta in their diets.

Americans are quickly catching up. A study in 2003 found that 1 in 133 US citizens tested positive for celiac disease (and most people are not aware that they have it.)

This autoimmune condition has diverse and widespread symptoms.

In celiac disease, the intestinal villae (the finger-like projections that are responsible for the absorption of nutrients,) become damaged and flattened by allergic immune responses.

Gluten is not just in wheat products like bread and pasta: you can find it in beer, mustard, salad dressing, chocolate and even some herbal teas!

Grains and flours that are gluten-free include:

- Amaranth
- Arrowroot
- Buckwheat
- Chickpea
- Cornmeal
- Flax
- Millet
- Oats
- Potato
- Rice

Like soy, you can spot hidden gluten on labels that have:

- Dextrin
- Hydrolyzed Plant Protein (HPP)

- Hydrolyzed Vegetable Protein (HVP)
- Malt
- Modified Food Starch
- Natural and artificial flavoring
- Starch

Once you begin to recognize the hidden sources of gluten on labels, all it takes is a quick glance to determine whether a product is gluten-free, and this effort can go a long way into reducing immune system reactions to your food.

Strategy #5: Food Additives

Food additives are commonly troubling to fibromyalgia sufferers. Many additives are excitotoxins, that is, they excite nerve endings associated with pain pathways.

Food additives include food colorings, emulsifiers such as vegetable gums, flavorings like artificial sweeteners and preservatives.

Many food colorings and preservatives commonly used in America have been banned in Europe after studies have linked their use to problems in learning, memory and behavior.

Food coloring

The following food dyes are known to be common allergens and/or cause other health problems:

- Allura Red
- Amaranth (Red #2)
- Annatto
- Carmoisine (E122)
- Ponceau 4R (E124)
- Quinoline yellow
- Saffron
- Sunset yellow (E110 or Yellow #6)
- Tartrazine

Food Preservatives

The following preservatives generate free radicals and have a host of other negative effects:

- Benzoates
- BHA
- BHT
- Butylates
- Calcium propionate
- EDTA
- Gallates
- Mono- and Di-glycerides
- Nitrates
- Nitrites
- Sodium Erythroate
- Sorbates (sorbic acid)
- Sulphites
- Sulphur dioxide

It does not make sense for anyone to ingest unknown and unrecognizable ingredients in their food but it can make a world of difference for fibromyalgia sufferers.

Strategy #6: Toxins (environmental)

We live in a toxic world. Air, water and soil pollution, antibiotics in our food and water, hormone mimickers in our health and beauty products, plastics, heavy metals and electromagnetic radiation bombard our bodies and overtax the liver everyday.

Many researchers are convinced that a significant cause of fibromyalgia-onset is due to the overwhelming amount of toxins that we are routinely exposed to.

You can limit this toxin overload by avoiding:

- Alcohol

Alcohol depletes nutrients and creates fatty deposits in the liver. The metabolism of alcohol creates highly reactive intermediate compounds and a large amount of free radicals. Alcohol damages liver cells and triggers the immune response.

- Caffeine

Caffeine triggers stress hormones that tax your adrenal glands and alter hormonal balances. Caffeine is a diuretic and flushes vital nutrients.

- Carbonated Drinks

You might realize that soda is an unhealthy drink because of added sugars and/or artificial sweeteners but carbonation is damaging too. The carbon dioxide that creates those tiny bubbles weakens stomach acid and affects digestion. Carbon dioxide throws off electrolyte balances and leaches calcium from cells.

- Water

Water is necessary for every physiological process including the flushing of toxins. Drinking more water will increase cellular metabolism, ease joint pain, improve skin tone and give you added energy.

Bottled water contains *more* contaminants than tap water however, being mostly unregulated. Bottled water contains many chemicals, from fertilizers and fuel propellant to arsenic and radioactive isotopes. Estrogen-mimickers also leach from plastic into water and disrupt the endocrine system.

Tap water might be more regulated and safer than bottled water and yet this water still contains 260 different contaminants, 141 of which are not regulated by the Environmental Protection Agency.

Water filters are a great investment.

Adding lemon, lime and/or a few drops of hydrogen peroxide to your water will help combat acidity in the body and neutralize free radicals.

- Medicine

Both prescription and over-the counter drugs tax the liver. These medications end up and end up our soil, water and food.

Acetaminophen is quickly becoming the leading cause of liver disease.

- Heavy Metals

Heavy metals depress the immune system and burden the liver.

We can reduce our intake of heavy metals by using glass, cast iron, carbon steel, titanium and enamel cookware, using natural cleaning products and avoiding personal care products with aluminum and bismuth.

- Electromagnetic radiation

Computer screens, TV screens, cell phones and microwaves all emit harmful Electro Magnetic Frequencies or EMF's. Research has just begun to investigate the effects of these constant low-grade electromagnetic waves and so far, it looks grim.

There are products that can neutralize EMF's from computer screens. Use the speaker function on your cell phone rather than holding it to your head.

- Hormones

Buy animal products that are labeled "hormone and antibiotic-free," avoid overuse of plastic containers and plastic wrap and be choosy about your personal care products. All of these things contain hormones or hormone-mimickers that can throw off your endocrine system.

What is particularly dangerous about substances in personal care products is that we apply them to our skin everyday for many, many years. The skin is a permeable organ. It can absorb toxic compounds at 10 times the rate that orally ingested toxins can.

Visit the Environmental Working Group's ***Skin Deep*** Cosmetic Safety database at www.cosmeticsdatabase.com/ to check out your product, discover what to look for on labels, and find alternatives.

You do not have to live in a bubble to greatly reduce toxin load. Taking some simple and vital steps such as drinking clean water and avoiding toxic personal care products can make great differences in your body's ability to function properly.

Strategy #7: Cleansing & Detoxification

You can help ease the toxin load in your body by doing a cleanse or detox program once or twice a year. It is kind of like hitting the "restart" or "reboot" button. You help your colon and liver to "catch up" with the toxins that have been accumulating in your

body. Since toxin load seems to be linked to fibromyalgia, give your organs both a rest and a boost with an occasional cleanse.

1) Lowering Toxin Intake

You must begin lowering the amount of toxins you take in *before* you begin a detox program. A detox program causes trapped toxins to be released back into the bloodstream before they are eliminated. You will feel their effects: this is called a “healing crisis” or “die-off effect.” The less toxins you take in before you start a cleanse, the better you will feel.

- Reduce alcohol, additives, hydrogenated fats and oils, preservatives, processed and refined foods and red meat.
- Add healthy oils, healthy fats and proteins (fish, beans, nuts, seeds, avocados) lemon water, raw, organic vegetables and whole grains.

2) Reducing Digestive Load

This cleansing step is often confusing to people. Digestive load and toxin load are very different matters.

The reason that you will want to ease digestive work is so that your colon and liver are relieved of the bulk of those duties and have more energy to simply catch up with neutralizing and eliminating toxins.

Fiber helps to keep the colon and liver healthy but it is also very hard to digest. During this phase of detox, you will want to limit your intake of whole grains and whole raw foods. The key to this stage is supplying your body with the nutrients it needs in ways that it can easily assimilate.

- Juice raw fruits and vegetables to gain easily digestible nutrients.
- Purée vegetables and steam grains to help break down fiber.
- Make green drinks. Chlorophyll helps oxygenate and alkalize the blood.
- Add flaxseed oil, fish oil or olive oil to vegetables so that you can utilize fat-soluble vitamins and minerals.
- Make vegetable soups and meat broths.

- Eat wild-caught fish.
- Eat sprouted grains and grasses.

3) Supplementation

Supplement with plenty of antioxidants so that the neutralization of released toxins can occur rapidly.

The list of antioxidant vitamins and minerals includes:

- Vitamins C, E, and the B-complex vitamins: thiamine (B₁), riboflavin (B₂), nicotinamide (B₃), calcium pantothenate (B₅), pyridoxine (B₆), cyanocobalmin (B₁₂), biotin, inositol and folic acid.
- Carotenoids are what create the orange and red coloring in some fruits and vegetables. These are the basis of vitamin A and have other health-promoting benefits.
- Magnesium, potassium and natural sodium
- Selenium
- Zinc

4) Hastening Toxin Removal

The organs of elimination include the colon, the kidneys, the lungs and the skin. You can hasten the removal of toxins from your body by:

- Dry-brushing your skin
- Deep breathing
- Epsom salt baths
- Epsom saltwater drink
- Herbal teas
- Herbal laxatives
- Lemon water

- Sweat rooms and saunas

Overall, the best treatment for fibromyalgia may prove to be diet-related. A 2001 study, published in *Biomed Central (BMC) Complementary and Alternative Medicine*, found that 19 out of 30 fibromyalgia sufferers showed “marked improvement in all FMS symptoms” when put on a mostly raw and vegetarian diet.

Seventy percent of your immune system occurs in the digestive tract and 75% of detoxification depends on the liver’s access to nutrients and freedom from toxin load. “Auto-intoxication” is a term that applies to the recirculation and re-absorption of toxins due to poor diet and constant toxin exposure. Like a fish in a tank with a clogged filter, food choices can help your colon and liver to eliminate toxins or block their ability to do so.

Add a raw salad to your dinner every night. Buy a water filter and add lemon. Read food labels and buy real food. Simple choices can make a world of difference in your quality of life as a person with fibromyalgia.