How to Cope With Fibromyalgia Pain

by STARLA RICH

What Can I Do to Relieve Fibromyalgia Pain?

I have a confession to make. I can't remember the last time I had a completely pain-free day. This admission is not meant to discourage, however, because I can recall several recent days when the pain was minimal and manageable.

For those diagnosed with fibromyalgia, you perfectly understand what I mean when I distinguish between minimal pain days and full-fledged painful flare-up days. Widespread pain is the signature symptom and condition of those with FMS.

While doctors and researchers are still divided on all the reasons why those with fibromyalgia suffer from chronic pain.

It is believed that the nerves in the body are more sensitive to environmental stimuli such as the weather and barometric pressure, more sensitive to sensory triggers such as touch and temperature and that the brain function that controls the neurological system and the body's response to pain is off balance.

Whatever the causes of the pain, the fact that pain is part of living life with fibromyalgia is a certainty. While flare-up days make everything seem more difficult and can be discouraging, the intensity and frequency of the pain that flare-ups bring do not have to be unmanageable or unbearable.

Even though there is no cure for fibromyalgia, fibro-friendly lifestyle changes and medications can significantly reduce pain and fatigue. Fibromyalgia pain comes and goes, and we can be prepared with strategies to cope with its cycles and flare-ups.

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When fibromyalgia fatigue or pain is severe, it might be tough for you to think clearly. Whether it is the pain, the fatigue or the brain fog associated with flare-ups, fibromyalgia symptoms can send you spiraling into stress and despair if you aren't prepared.

I have been walking this journey of life with fibromyalgia for almost seventeen years now, and understanding more about what produces my flare-ups as well as having a plan and strategy for dealing with them, gives me a sense of control over my symptoms and my life.

Though I don't always experience signs of an imminent flare-up, I can quickly use some of the techniques and strategies I've learned to reduce the symptoms and better cope with the pain and fatigue.

If you are newly diagnosed with FMS, as you learn various techniques for coping, it might be good to write down your options. Keep your list handy so that you can grab it when you feel a flare-up building.

Different strategies work better for some people than for others. Some may work fine for you on one day but not on another. That's why it's good to have a variety of options written down to choose from.

Avoid Negative Self-Talk

There is an old proverb that states *“as a man thinks in his heart, so he is.”* Studies have shown that what we say to ourselves inside our heads can affect our perception of pain.

Turning negative thoughts into positive ones takes practice, but it's worth the effort. Below are some comparisons between negative and positive “self-talk.”

Negative	Positive
I can't do anything because of my symptoms.	I can do many things. I just need to pace myself and take breaks.
I have no control over my happiness. The pain controls me.	I can control my happiness. I can be happy and enjoy life despite pain.
People at work are upset with me. They don't think I'm doing my share.	I will do the best job I can and feel good about my accomplishments.

Reach Out To Others When You’re Having a Difficult Day

No matter how much you want to keep things to yourself so as not to worry others or so as not to appear weak, resist that urge to hide your symptoms and struggles. Trying to deal with your pain and fatigue alone is detrimental to you as well as for your loved ones and friends.

Some alone time is a good way to relax, but isolating yourself for days can end up making you feel lonely and cause you to be misunderstood. It can worsen your symptoms and lengthen your flare-ups.

Tell an understanding friend or family member that you're feeling frustrated or overwhelmed — but don't dwell on your signs and symptoms. Once they have a better understanding of what you are dealing with, their support and listening ear can provide strength and relief as a means of coping better.

Outside of those close to you, there are also in-person or online support groups such as NewLifeOutlook, that can link you to people who are dealing with fibromyalgia. These groups of fellow fibro warriors bring comfort in talking with people who are facing the same types of challenges, members as well as insight into coping techniques that might work for you too.

Spend Your Energy Wisely

Think of energy as money in the bank. Since you only have so much “reserve” it is important to prioritize tasks so that you won't run out of resources before the day is done. Pace yourself and take frequent breaks to rest. This is vital for days when your symptoms flare.

Look at what's coming up on your calendar. Identify what's necessary and what's not. Focus your energy in the next few days on what's needed. Prioritizing your tasks can help reduce your stress levels as stress only magnifies the pain.

Just Ask

There will be times when you are simply not up to your tasks of the day. There is no shame in asking for help during such moments.

Make a list of people who can help you on bad days. For instance, a family member may be willing to fix meals or run errands for a day. You may be reluctant to be a burden, but your friends and family love you and want to help.

Another option is to split chores up into smaller tasks that can be divided among everyone in the house.

If everybody helps a little with cooking and cleanup of a meal, for example, no one person gets worn out. When others help you on painful days, you bounce back much sooner so that you can once again resume those things you love to do for them.

Outside of your network of family and friends, there are other means of acquiring help with your daily tasks. Online grocery shopping with curbside pick up or delivery, public transportation or Uber if you don't feel up to driving, hiring neighborhood kids to help with yard work, or teens to assist with house chores and cleaning. These are short-term options until you are feeling up to par again.

Get Your Mind Off Things

Sometimes when you focus less on your pain and fatigue, you can reduce the symptoms. Look for activities to distract you from your pain…

- Funny movies (laughter really is the best medicine!)
- Quick-read books (travel far away through a short story)
- Outings with friends (enjoying the company of others without stress is soothing)
- Favorite museums (the leisurely walk, the colors, textures, and beauty of a museum prove to be good therapy)
- Beautiful walking paths (the serenity of nature and the gentle exercise of walking can clear the mind, reduce stress and work out painful areas of the body)

Relax

Set aside time for relaxation in your daily schedule. Add more relaxation time on days when your fibromyalgia symptoms flare. Pushing on days of pain and flare-ups can prolong your symptoms. It is important to pull back and relax. Experiment with various methods until you find what best calms you.

Relaxation techniques include:

- Deep-breathing exercises
- Progressive muscle relaxation
- Meditation
- Visualization
- Yoga
- Prayer
- Massage
- Listening to nature

Keep At It

The more often you use coping strategies, the easier they become. Figure out what works for you and understand that may change from day-to-day. Be flexible and try another coping strategy if needed.

If you have fibromyalgia, difficult days are inevitable. But planning ahead can help you take control of the bad days so that fibromyalgia pain doesn't take control of you.