10 Habits That Could Be Aggravating Your Symptoms

by STARLA RICH

10 Things To Avoid With Fibromyalgia

When my son was little, he experienced what most curious toddlers experience – the “look but don’t touch” phase. Everything shiny and new, old and familiar, and all things within reach captured his attention.

Other parents with little ones chose to put everything of value away in a closet or high on a shelf so as not to have their treasures destroyed by their inquisitive toddler. I, however, chose to teach my son what he could and could not touch and the consequences of his choices.

I felt that this was the best training tool for me, as I knew he would want to explore similar objects in the homes of my family and friends who did not have small children. It seemed to work. He developed an understanding and appreciation of the things he could not hold in his hand and respected the value of those things.

Similarly, I think people with chronic illnesses such as diabetes, food allergies and fibromyalgia must develop a “look, but don’t touch” mindset. Trying to hide them away or pretend they don’t exist doesn’t allow us to develop any discipline regarding such things.

Let’s explore some of the things that are a threat to health and optimal maintenance of fibromyalgia.

Habits That Could Be Triggering Your Fibromyalgia Symptoms

1. MSG (Monosodium Glutamate)

MSG is a flavor enhancer found in many of the processed foods we buy at the grocery stores – as well as in some fruits and vegetables. Other food additives (like MSG) activate neurons that increase the sensitivity to pain in fibromyalgia sufferers.

In a study of fibromyalgia patients conducted by researchers at the Malcolm Randall Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Florida, they found that “all had complete, or nearly complete, resolution of their symptoms within months after eliminating monosodium glutamate (MSG) or MSG plus aspartame from their diet.”

Common foods containing MSG include frozen dinners, Chinese food, canned vegetables or soups, tomatoes, potatoes, mushrooms, parmesan cheeses and more. When grocery shopping, check the label for MSG and other additives.

There are also other names for it or other ingredients that have a high MSG content but aren’t required to say so. Look out for these ingredients on food labels:

- Glutamic Acid (E 620)2
- Glutamate (E 620)

- Yeast Extract
- Anything hydrolyzed
- Caseinate
- Gelatin

2. Changes In the Weather

Several years ago, I began to notice extreme reactions to temperature changes.

After grocery shopping, I would have to come home and wrap myself in a blanket. When spending time in my yard during the summer, I would experience extreme hot flashes after coming indoors.

My doctor informed me that those with fibromyalgia struggle with regulating body temperature. In fact, as much as 92 percent of fibromyalgia sufferers report that weather affects their symptoms.

As I stated with my own experiences, the most common weather phenomena associated with flare-ups of fibromyalgia symptoms are extremes in temperature (too hot or too cold), changes in barometric pressure and rapid changes in weather.

Take necessary precautions to avoid or offset these triggers. In extreme heat stay well hydrated. In cold weather layer your clothing. Take a blanket in your car with you while traveling or running errands should you need to take time to warm up.

3. Over-exertion

If you are a “doer” like me, then this one is difficult to avoid. It took me awhile to readjust to the mindset that my “worth” was not tied to my level of productivity.

I had to learn to pace myself and prioritize. Also, when we do have the rare “good day,” we develop this mentality that we need to get as much done as possible while we are feeling well and energetic.

However, it doesn’t take long to discover that doing so can throw us into a full fledge flare-up. It may not happen the next day, but eventually, the pain catches up with us, and we spend more time recovering. Discipline yourself to “not touch that” concerning pacing and limits.

4. “The White Stuff,” Also Known As Sugar

Sugar and simple carbs provide a fast boost of energy but also are followed up by a huge crash in energy levels.

Also, those with FMS are more sensitive to changes in blood sugar, so both sugar and simple carbs should be avoided or at the least consumed in moderation. Over-consumption of sugar causes our nerves to swell as water is drawn into them. At the same time, the sugar makes the outer layer of the nerve cells less flexible, causing them to crack and tear.

Consumption of sugar can lead to nerve damage, often resulting in pain, numbness or tingling in the extremities. However, if you can’t avoid sugar altogether, purchase unrefined organic sugar for baking and sweetening.

5. Caffeine

I confess I love my morning cup of coffee. Given the struggle that many dealing with fibro fatigue and exhaustion–caffeine is always the answer to getting a “quick fix" of energy.

However, too much caffeine can produce the opposite effects on our bodies, stealing sleep and zapping energy in the end. If you cannot live without your morning “cup of joe,” limit coffee, tea, and other caffeinated-drinks to the morning and avoid consumption after lunch or evening.

6. Dairy

While I am not a milk drinker, I love cheese – any and every variety of cheese.

Still, dairy is not always the best choice for our diet. Secondary conditions associated with fibromyalgia are irritable bowel syndrome, bloating, gas, pain, and cramping. Digestive issues (like “leaky gut”) contribute to much of our inflammation and pain throughout the body.

If you do indulge in dairy products, consume raw, organic dairy foods and avoid anything pasteurized.

7. Long Naps

Achieving deep sleep at night is difficult to reach for those diagnosed with fibromyalgia, many find it necessary to take naps during the day to cope with the chronic fatigue. While napping can be a necessity, it is best to avoid taking long, frequent naps.

In a study of over one thousand adults suffering from fibromyalgia, researchers found a correlation between longer daytime naps and an increase in the severity of symptoms. With that in mind, the best approach may be to take shorter naps throughout the day to help your body rest and rejuvenate without increasing your symptoms.

8. Sensory Overload

Nerve endings that are more sensitive is a major condition of those suffering from fibromyalgia. We are more sensitive to loud noises, odors, bright lights and more. If the senses become overloaded, it can often trigger headaches or migraines, among other things. Avoiding situations where sensory overload may occur can save you from an unwanted flare-up of symptoms.

9. Smoking

Everyone should avoid smoking – ill or not. For fibromyalgia sufferers, that is more reason to kick the habit. According to a study by the University of Illinois College of Medicine, fibromyalgia patients who smoked reported “significantly more pain, numbness, severity, and functional difficulties than non-smokers.”

10. Sitting for Too Long

Dealing with chronic pain robs the motivation to remain active. Still, it is important to keep blood flowing no matter the pain or the fatigue. JustStand.org estimates that the average person sits for seven to nine hours a day.

All of this sitting, combined with poor posture, can lead to greater pain, stiffness, and tenderness in fibromyalgia sufferers. Sitting and poor posture also cut off circulation in the body, thereby cutting off the fresh supply of essential oxygen and nutrients to different systems in the body.

If you are required to sit at your job most of the day, take frequent breaks to stand and stretch. Alter your schedule and activities at home so that you are not sitting for prolonged periods of time as well.

The Bottom Line...

The list of “things to avoid with fibromyalgia” might seem endless, but remember the answer isn’t to bury your head in the sand, to hide those things away or to put them beyond reach.

The answer is to develop discipline and practice moderation in all things. Avoiding certain things that cause conditions to worsen isn’t about robbing you of “life’s simple pleasures,” but about improving your overall health so that you can better enjoy life and all it has to give.