Avoid These 10 Foods That Can Trigger Fibromyalgia Symptoms

by STARLA RICH

Foods to Avoid With Fibromyalgia

Growing up in a house full of southern cooks, comfort food was part of our every day menu rather than an occasional treat. Starches like macaroni and cheese, mashed potatoes with gravy, breads such as cornbread and biscuits, desserts, red meat and everything fried covered our dinner tables. All the white stuff was a staple in our pantry — even in our beverages, as no southern meal was complete without a massive glass or two of sweet iced tea. We did, however, have fresh garden vegetables in abundance which thankfully offset our carb-rich diet. Also, the lack of preservatives from frozen, store-bought meals was of benefit as well. The big exception for my household was packaged snacks. Some of the foods mentioned are foods to avoid with fibromyalgia.

My mother was a junk food junkie and kept a supply of potato chips, cookies and candy. As I grew older, we began steering away from homegrown meals to what was convenient, and we had no idea the damage it could cause to our bodies.

Can Diet Impact Your Symptoms?

It was not until I began a concerted quest for healthy eating after being diagnosed with fibromyalgia, that I realized the difference diet makes in how we feel and in overall health. Those who suffer from fibromyalgia or some other painful condition, such as rheumatoid arthritis. know what I mean.

Certain foods trigger digestive issues, which increase inflammation in the body and results in chronic fatigue. If you have a night out for dinner without concern of what you order, you most assuredly face the consequences of your choices the next morning.

Some days we just do not feel like cooking or standing for any length of time in the kitchen – especially on flare-up days, so a readily prepared meal out, or fast food is the easiest (but not the wisest) alternative.

If you are like me, then you wake up the next day feeling like you have been beaten up! Still, comfort food becomes too easy for us. Chronic pain also hinders us from exercise which can lead to obesity and is a vicious, unending cycle.

10 Foods to Avoid if You Have Fibromyalgia

When society began the healthy eating trend several years ago, unintended consequences made some symptoms worse through alternatives that were added to diets as a substitute for the bad choices.

We cut out sugar and added artificial sweeteners, and removed breads made with white flour opting for whole wheat, which added gluten.

These items will be discussed further below, but with so much advice floating around regarding healthy alternative

choices for our diet, planning our daily meals can become overwhelming.

While more studies are needed, there is a consensus among health experts regarding certain foods. In fact, most of the foods that are mentioned are simply a given for every diet, not just those dealing with chronic illness or pain.

So what are some of the foods to avoid with fibromyalgia?

1. Aspartame, Additives and Preservatives

One of the foods additives that can adversely trigger certain receptors located within the nervous system is aspartame. Aspartame was added to our diets years ago as a healthy alternative to sugar for weight loss and weight management.

Brand names for this artificial sweetener are Equal and Nutri-Sweet. Aspartame is used to sweeten certain beverages, yogurts, frozen desserts and other foods without adding calories.

A published study in the Journal of Rheumatology discovered that nerves were stimulated when people who were diagnosed with fibromyalgia were given aspartame.

There have been case reports linking aspartame to fibromyalgia:

- A 50-year-old woman who had been living with fibromyalgia for 10 years experienced improvement of her painful symptoms when she vacationed in a foreign country and did not use aspartame. However, her symptoms reappeared when she returned home and began aspartame use again.
- A 45-year-old man found that his forearm, wrist, hand and cervical spine pain stopped when he discontinued aspartame.

My personal experience was a reduction in headaches and migraines once I deleted it from my diet. I also found my mental clarity and “brain fog” was reduced as well. Aside from aspartame, did you know that Diet Coke also has traces of formaldehyde?

2. Monosodium Glutamate and Sodium Nitrate

These substances are used to preserve and flavor enhance. They are also full of salt, which can aggravate pain or swelling in some fibromyalgia patients.

To minimize the impact of MSG and nitrites on your fibromyalgia, avoid prepackaged foods as much as possible and focus on whole foods like lentils, brown rice and fish. Take note of restaurants who have chosen not to use MSG in their preparation.

3. Caffeine

It may be tempting to combat fibromyalgia symptoms like fatigue with a steady dose of coffee or cola drinks, but caffeine can interfere with your ability to get restful sleep — a significant factor in minimizing painful fibromyalgia symptoms.

A Norwegian study published in the journal Arthritis & Rheumatism also suggests that sleep problems may play a role in fibromyalgia development. If you enjoy drinking caffeinated beverages, consume them during the first half of the day only to minimize sleep problems.

Fibromyalgia sufferers should ideally stay away from foods containing caffeine, including chocolate in addition to coffee and soft drinks. Caffeine increases the heart rate and blood pressure, placing additional strain on muscle tissue.

- If you love chocolate, try to adopt the mantra “all things in moderation.” Occasional bites of chocolate versus daily consumption of it as a comfort food can make or break how you feel.
- If you are a coffee drinker, the same mantra should apply. Some people experience headaches without their morning cup of Joe, so strive for moderate use and balance as you wean yourself off caffeine consumption.

4. Sugar

Sugar is a type of carbohydrate, which is a substance that provides energy for the body, and this often appeals to people whose fibromyalgia leaves them fatigued. It is short-term though, once the sugar high is gone. Too much sugar can pack on the pounds, leaving fibro patients in even more pain.

An article in the Journal of Pain found that obese fibromyalgia patients suffer more severe symptoms, including pain, stiffness and sleep problems.

If you are craving something sweet, go for something with natural sugars, like a piece of fruit. Also, if you do see a need for sugar in your diet, try to opt for unrefined organic sugars. Refined sugar (the white stuff) produces inflammation.

5. Dairy

Many people – both with and without fibromyalgia — are lactase-deficient and have bloating and gas that can slow them down after they drink milk or eat dairy products. Try eliminating milk-based products from your diet for a few weeks to see whether your symptoms improve.

If you do feel better, seek out calcium-rich dairy alternatives, like soy milk, as well as salmon, broccoli and tuna.

It has been proven that the cause of many chronic conditions stems from a “leaky gut” and digestive issues. Dairy is a huge culprit of these problems.

I am not a milk drinker but do love cheese. To combat the effects of dairy and other food allergies, add an organic probiotic to your daily regimen. I use a probiotic that specifically targets the bloating and gas that come from certain foods.

Making this change in my diet also reduced the symptoms of irritable bowel syndrome.

6. Gluten

Celiac disease (an intolerance to the gluten found in wheat, barley and rye products) is a condition that may overlap with fibromyalgia in some people.

This health concern is a bit ironic since wheat was introduced into our diets many years ago as the healthy alternative to the white flour breads, and high-carb kinds of pasta. Note that many sauces, marinades and even candies may contain gluten.

In this debate concerning gluten, a 2014 study confirmed that fibromyalgia patients who were negative for celiac disease still had significant improvements in pain and/or quality of life indicators when following a gluten-free diet.

Due to gluten consumption concerns, many manufacturers have adopted healthy gluten-free alternatives.

7. White Flour

White flour can aggravate the pain symptoms of fibromyalgia. The body converts white flour, which is a simple carbohydrate, into sugars. These sugars promote fatigue, disrupt sleep patterns and increase pain.

White flour can also contribute to weight gain, placing additional stress on the joints and muscles. Using whole wheat or almond flour would be a great alternative. Read the alternative labels to determine if they are made gluten-free or not.

8. Nightshades

The nightshade family of fruits and vegetables include tomatoes, bell peppers, white potatoes, eggplant, chilies and paprika. The main culprit in the nightshade family of fruit and vegetable is called solanine.

Solanine is a glycoalkaloid poison and is primarily displayed by gastrointestinal and neurological disorders. It's produced naturally by these plants as a defense mechanism and has fungicidal and pesticidal properties.

Research shows that 74% to 90% of people who had inflammatory conditions, like arthritis or fibromyalgia, suffered from increased inflammation and pain after eating nightshade fruits or vegetables.

This one is a difficult one for me, like some of the others on our list due, to my love of fresh-from-the-garden vegetables and southern recipes made with tomatoes, peppers and eggplant. I also love Italian cuisine, which often includes these vegetables.

Experiment with these foods to see how your body reacts and as before, remember: "all things in moderation!"

9. Fried Foods

Like saturated fats and sugars, fried foods contribute to feelings of fatigue. They also inhibit circulation and increase the sensitivity of nerve endings to pain., So, fibromyalgia sufferers should avoid fried foods.

Just typing that statement was painful for me as a southern cook! If you simply cannot entirely remove fried foods from your diet, try to use healthier oils, such as olive oil, for frying.

10. Red Meat

Red meats tend to be high in saturated fats.

The saturated fats in red meats interfere with proper circulation and increase sensitivity to pain. They also contribute to fatigue, making it difficult for fibromyalgia sufferers to get the exercise they need to promote muscle flexibility and range of motion.

White meat, such as chicken or fish, is the best to eat. Omega-3 fatty acids, found in fatty fish, like salmon, walnuts and flaxseed, are known to reduce inflammation and help prevent cardiovascular diseases.

However, their soreness-reducing traits may also help pain patients. A 2007 study found that after just three months of supplementing omega-3 fatty acids, symptoms such as morning stiffness and painful, tender joints, decreased.

Back To The Basics

In doing a personal assessment of the diet that I have been accustomed to my whole life through traditional southern cooking, I have questioned how my grandparents achieved longevity. Despite eating many of the items on our list of what not to eat, my fraternal grandmother lived to be 94 years old.

My maternal grandmother is still with us, a bit feeble but of sound mind and she will be 96 years old next March.

My grandfathers lived into their upper 80s. They ate everything and more on the list of white stuff as I mentioned, like breads and sweets. They drank sweet iced tea daily, fried everything in bacon grease or Crisco and had their

share of pork and beef.

The conclusion that I can draw as to why those things did not fully affect them is that most of what they ate was what we would call all natural.

They balanced their high-carb diets with fruits and vegetables from their gardens that were not saturated with pesticides. High-fiber and protein-rich items, like beans, greens and chicken, gave them the energy they needed for their long days.

They slaughtered and prepared much of their meats (cows and chickens), fished from their ponds and drank fresh well water or water from a spring, and finally they stayed active – working their farms and gardens and tending to a large family of children.

The Bottom Line

A well-balanced diet can give you more energy to stay physically active and can potentially improve your overall health.

Whether you suffer from fibromyalgia or not, it just makes sense to try to eat a diet high in fruits, vegetables (aside from nightshades), whole grains and lean protein. It also makes sense not to consume foods that are highly processed and prepared with preservatives. This will limit your salt and sugar intake.

Staying with foods that are as close to nature as possible, provides your body the nutrition it needs to survive and thrive.