Train Your Brain to Improve Fibromyalgia Memory Loss

by SARAH BORIEN

Training Your Brain Can Relieve Mental and Physical Symptoms

Memory loss can be annoying, frightening, or downright dangerous. In fibromyalgia sufferers, continuous memory impairment — or “fibro fog” as it’s sometimes called — is a part of life, and can wreak havoc on daily obligations. From difficulty finding words and staying focused to long-term memory lapses, the mind tends to slow down in various ways, and that can make other symptoms of the disease more difficult to handle. Let's take a look at fibromyalgia memory loss.

How Fibromyalgia Symptoms Can Weaken Memory

Three of the most common and most powerful fibromyalgia symptoms can negatively impact memory:

- **Sleep Disturbance**. Many fibromyalgia patients suffer from poor quality sleep, and without adequate sleep, the brain cannot absorb memories to be recalled later. A good night’s sleep ensures the hippocampus and neocortex — the brain’s long-term memory processing centers — continue to work properly.
- **Anxiety**. Depression and anxiety are major players in fibromyalgia, and they may have an impact on memory. Nervousness and worrying are distracting and could interfere with thought processes. Although there have been no studies to show whether anxiety symptoms directly impair memory, reducing mental distress will likely improve brain performance.
- **Pain**. Some experts believe that it takes mental effort to manage the chronic pain of fibromyalgia, which may divert brain power from other tasks involving memory. It follows that stronger, more consistent pain may have a stronger impact on memory.

Some tests have shown that fibromyalgia has the same effect on memory as 20 years of aging, particularly when you’re tackling a tough problem or multitasking. However, all is not lost. There are steps you can take to improve memory, which will restore your confidence and should diminish many of your fibromyalgia symptoms.

Ways to Cope With Memory Loss

- **Rest more.** Even in non-fibro patients, we recognize it’s hard to think clearly when we’re sleep deprived or overexerting ourselves, so it’s not surprising that memory troubles associated with fibro fog become worse when you're low on energy and exhausted.
- **Make lists.** Keep a notebook with you and make notes or write lists, keep your diary up to date and stay organized. These simple things can help you to feel in control of your brain and less confused.
- **Slow down.** Trying to do everything a healthy person can do will only leave you feeling like you’ve failed. It’s important to slow down and stop multi-tasking; by concentrating on one thing at a time you will feel more focused. It’s far more difficult to be confused when you only have one thing to think about.
- **Talk about it.** It’s common for fibromyalgia sufferers to feel like they're struggling on their own, with no one to understand — or even believe — what they're going through. Talk to your friends and family about

your fibro fog, as often talking aloud can make things seem clearer.

How to Clear Fibro Fog

Although memory loss can suggest a deeper cognitive problem, this is not the case in fibromyalgia cases. Experts insist that you have not lost your memories, they've just been misplaced, and with the help of certain techniques, you can improve your access to them.

Some of the most helpful exercises for clearing the fog are also some of the simplest:

- Work on puzzles, play word games and read more.
- Practice memory-building tricks for everyday tasks.
- Focus on one thing at a time.
- Get regular exercise to increase energy and reduce stress.

Exercise

Exercising can believe it or not, increase your energy levels. It helps to get your blood flowing and clear your mind.

Don't push yourself to the point of exhaustion, but swimming or a gentle walk can help you stay focused and reduce the fogginess. It also leaves you feeling tired (in a positive way) which in turn helps you sleep deeper.

Reduce Your Stress

When you're stressed, you are more likely to aggravate your fibromyalgia and your symptoms will intensify. Stress has a direct impact on our ability to concentrate and feel calm, and it often results in shorter breaths and therefore less oxygen in our brains.

It's important to find ways to reduce stress — perhaps through yoga or meditation — that will, in turn, reduce your fibrofog.

Engage Your Brain

Whilst not overdoing it, it's important to keep your brain busy. Engaging in things like reading, crossword puzzles or art therapy can keep your brain active and keep you alert, therefore less likely to slip into a confused or muddled state.

Set Routines

It is often recommended for people experiencing cognitive dysfunction that you set routines for yourself. These can be as little as always putting your keys on the hook or setting out your clothes the night before. This goes back to feeling like you are in control and reducing your stress — less to remember is less to forget.

Eat Healthy

Diet is important for anyone, but it's particularly important for people with fibromyalgia and our food and drink choices can often impact our cognitive strength. For example, don't rely on sugar highs and caffeine to get you through foggy periods; you may feel like you've been given a boost but this can confuse you further – especially when you crash.

Fibromyalgia tends to interfere with many aspects of life, but it doesn't have to disable your mental abilities. It will take some extra effort, but developing healthy mind and body habits is your best bet for better memory and concentration.