Benefits of Eating Well With Fibromyalgia

by BARBARA LEECH

Food for Fibromyalgia Patients: The Healthier the Better

If you have fibromyalgia, you have probably heard that what you put into your body can be a deciding factor in how you feel that day and in the days that follow. What we fuel our bodies with can either support our health and limit the level of pain and discomfort we experience, or it can fan the flames of fibro into a full-blown attack.

I have seen the results of my own eating habits rollercoaster; plummeting into an indulging cycle of foods I should avoid produced debilitating pain and suffering. On the flip side, I have had periods of time where I committed to healthy eating and avoided trigger foods, eventually feeling less pain and in charge.

But, I am human. The holidays always wreak havoc on my heathy diet intensions and what I eat. I end up on the poor diet/pain cycle rollercoaster, as I call it. I am on the crazy ride as I write this; there are Doritos in my cupboard I want desperately — the struggle is real.

I have to get back on track. I have been in so much pain that I feel like everything hurts me; moving hurts, lying down hurts, even my pillow is suddenly causing such severe neck and upper back pain that I am awake at dawn.

Essentially, there is no position where I can find relief. I may have, at least in part, caused this painful flare because I have been making poor choices when it comes to my daily diet. It has to stop.

Get Off Your Bad-Eating Rollercoaster

The holidays are over so I have no excuse for eating in ways that trigger more fibromyalgia pain. But my research has told me exactly what I have to do to help myself: I must get off the bad diet rollercoaster — perhaps you need to as well.

First you need to know what causes you more pain and fatigue with your fibromyalgia. To do this you should keep a food journal, and note everything you put into your body for about two or three weeks.

You should also note exactly how you are feeling each day in terms of your fibromyalgia. This will allow you to look back and see certain patterns emerging, where certain foods trigger more pain or, on the flip side, days of improvement in how you feel.

Doctors say they often see a commonality in trigger foods, according to discussions they have with their fibromyalgia patients. I personally need to avoid consuming things like soda, processed foods, nitrates, and too much dairy or gluten.

All of these things have a profound effect on my pain and stiffness, and though it takes willpower, the goal of feeling better should be enough to motivate me, right?

Well, not always, but I think there is safety in numbers, so I encourage you to give healthier eating a try if you have not done so already.

The First Step is the Hardest

As the saying goes, the first step is the hardest. But with fibromyalgia, the first few *days* of steps are the usually hardest, mainly because you will not see immediate results to your health.

Next page: steps to get started on a healthier path.

The First Step is the Hardest

Clean out Your Cupboards

The trick for me to stay on track is to simply not have poor food choices readily available. So, I clean out and get rid of (or do not re-stock) foods I should not be eating. This means when the Doritos are gone, I am done with them. Parting is such sweet sorrow, but I know I will thank myself in a week or two.

Get a Food Journal and Use It Daily

Logging what you eat is boring but worth the time and effort once you begin to pinpoint what is causing you more pain and suffering. Knowledge is power, and since everybody is different, you need to know what you personally should avoid eating.

We also tend to forget all the bad stuff we are eating until we see it in writing. Once you know you have to write it down in your journal, it makes you accountable and you may find you think twice about your choices.

Buy Good Food and Make Them Easily Accessible

You need to have a supply of healthy foods (organic veggies and fruit for example) and they need to be washed and chopped so you can quickly grab them and snack. Sometimes the prep-work needed with these healthier foods is what stops me from grabbing them for a quick bite to eat, so I do that right after I shop for them.

If they are already washed and ready to eat, they are the easy choice for me in a moment of snacking weakness. Other good choices include foods that naturally contain good fats, like in cold-water fish and walnuts, and protein-rich foods, like lean meats.

Look Closely at Common Trigger Foods

As I said, not everyone is affected the same way by certain foods, but many people with fibromyalgia find that pain can be fueled by eating things like:

- **Nitrates.** This is a preservative found in hotdogs, sandwich meats, bacon and even wine. There are certain natural brands of these products you can buy that do not contain nitrates.
- **Sugar or high fructose corn syrup.** This also includes anything high in carbs, which of course turns into sugar in the body.
- **Dairy.** I have never cut out dairy completely (I *love* cheese) but I limit my consumption and it does seem to help.
- **Gluten.** Many people with fibromyalgia say going gluten-free has made a huge difference in their pain, but it takes a big commitment. Gluten is in things you might not think twice about. I try and limit my consumption, but have not been able to stick with gluten-free for very long.
- **Preservatives, artificial sweeteners, artificial flavorings and food coloring.** Natural is best. Avoid foods that can stay fresh for several weeks, contain dyes, and have ingredients in them you cannot easily

pronounce. Artificial sweeteners are the worst for fibromyalgia patients and really should be avoided completely.

Though you probably won’t see or feel the results of healthy eating for a couple of weeks, or even up to a couple of months, I personally have felt the results and know that it can make life much easier in terms of fibro pain and fatigue.

I urge you to join me and commit to start healthier eating today, or if you are like me, you will probably put it off and never start. Fight for better health! Fuel your body with what it needs to limit fibromyalgia and its effect on your life.