Fibromyalgia and Allergies: Are They Linked?

by PUJA RIOS

Fibromyalgia and Allergies

Nine years of fibromyalgia and RA have taught me that like Netflix and chill, fibromyalgia and allergies go hand-in-hand. While this may be the last thing a fibro patient wants to hear, it's true.

Raising awareness around this fact can save the people in our community lots of uncertainty, extra doctor visits, and loads of suffering.

As we know, living with fibromyalgia makes us extremely sensitive to, well, almost everything. Spicy foods, smells, hot and cold, bright lights, there's almost nothing that can escape fibro's reach, and we can add allergies to that list.

Let me give you a few examples of my experience with fibromyalgia and allergies.

Bad Hair Day

For seven years, I dyed my hair using the same hair dye and the same color, to cover my greys. A few months after being diagnosed with fibro, I arrived for my appointment to get my hair dyed, by the same hairdresser, using the same hair dye I had used for all of those years.

I was excited for that little boost you get when you walk out of the salon, looking great and feeling great, and I did! However, those moments become fewer and fewer – I looked forward to my refreshed look and was grateful that I could treat myself.

There was no reaction right away but that night was a different story. My body violently rejected something from my experience at the salon. My ears blew up like cauliflowers, and the back of my neck grew raised red scales – like a fish. Parts of my body felt like someone took a lit match to them – the pain was staggering and constant.

My husband rushed me to the hospital, and the ER gave me a cortisone shot and told me I would never be able to dye my hair again. It was time for me to embrace my inner Diane Keaton.

Skin and Moans

Growing up, I was blessed with good skin, no breakouts as a teen, I just washed my face and was out the door. The same was true of my adult life until I was diagnosed with fibro.

A year after the hair dye incident, I woke up to what I equate to hives all over my face, chest, and arms. What is going on? I didn't change my skin routine; my sheets get washed twice a week, where did these come from?

Benadryl cream and medicine helped and after two days, the hives subsided. A week later, while in a full flare, the

hives returned with weird scaly patches on my feet that itched like crazy.

The cause for many sleepless nights, my skin itched so bad that I scratched it raw, leaving me with scabs all over. The thought of another condition, another doctor, was so frustrating but I knew I had no choice. I bit the bullet and went to see a dermatologist.

The doctor diagnosed me with eczema on my face, chest and arms, and psoriasis on my feet. Where did this come from? I've never had issues with my skin and all of a sudden, I can't dye my hair, and I've got eczema and psoriasis.

Looking back, due to my diverse daily dose of drugs, I took a real risk when I took more medicine before talking to my doctor. My dream team of medical professionals has worked very hard to achieve safe and harmonious interactions with my many meds. Adding other potent chemicals into my body could end up throwing that balance off and sending me into a downward spiral.

Steps to Take for Managing Your Allergies and Fibromyalgia

Unfortunately with fibromyalgia, allergies are inevitable, but there are ways to manage the symptoms.

- **Get tested.** The sooner you get tested, the sooner you'll know what allergies you're dealing with and how you can fight them.
- **Talk to your doctor before taking other drugs.** Real dangers exist when we take multiple medications. The most serious of all – an overdose.
- **Go natural.** For optimal comfort, anything that touches our skin should be gentle and fragrance-free. That means lotions, cleansers, shampoo and conditioners, sunscreen, makeup, clothing, and linens. (Investing in 100% Egyptian cotton sheets turned out to be a dream come true.)
- **Stay hydrated.** Enough with crawling out of your skin! Soothe yourself – inside and out – by appointing a big water bottle to be your new best friend.
- **Try the Neti Pot.** I'm a huge fan because it's 100% natural. Using a saltwater solution, it will safely clear allergens from your nasal passageways.

Fibro is like the gift that keeps on giving, or rather, the curse that keeps on cursing. It shows no mercy – one more reason why it's so important for us to share what we've learned with one another.

Our conditions are always evolving, and no one's experience is the same. Every piece of this chaotic puzzle matters on our quests to find relief.