8 Ways to Cope During a Fibromyalgia Flare-Up

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How to Deal With a Fibromyalgia Flare-Up

Living with fibromyalgia means living with a wide variety of symptoms that can wane and change from day-to-day. Most of us live with a constant, steady stream of symptoms; such as pain, fatigue, difficulty sleeping, and more.

However, having fibromyalgia also means there will be occasional periods where fibromyalgia symptoms usually become more intense and last longer. During this time, we may also experience symptoms that we do not often have on a regular basis. This is commonly referred to as a fibromyalgia flare or a fibromyalgia flare-up.

A flare-up can be different from person to person, but for many, it means severe pain, with little to no let-up. A flare-up likely includes debilitating fatigue, even to the point of feeling weak and unable to stand or walk for much length of time.

Fibromyalgia flare-ups may also include headaches; worsened cognitive fatigue, or fibro fog; as well as increased mental distress, such as anxiety and/or depression. A flare-up can last anywhere from a few days to several weeks.

What Triggers Fibromyalgia Flare-Ups?

Numerous factors contribute to a flare-up. What triggers your flare may not be the same as what triggers another person's fibro flare.

Once you can distinguish your triggers, you may be able to avoid them effectively and reduce the flare-ups that you have.

Overextending Yourself

Pushing yourself past your limits may trigger a flare-up. Learning to pace yourself when it comes to physical activity and exercise is vital.

It is easy to push yourself too far and wind up paying for it later. Finding your limits and listening to your body can help to avoid this.

Stress, Anxiety, and Depression

Stress can cause much damage to the body, including increasing pain and fatigue in those with fibromyalgia. Anxiety and depression also cause physical symptoms that could lead to a flare-up.

Finding methods to help you cope with stress, as well as finding appropriate treatment for any mental health problems, may help to reduce the number of fibro flares you have.

Hormonal Changes

Fibromyalgia is closely linked to specific hormonal imbalances. This means that a change in your hormones can easily affect your symptoms.

Women with fibromyalgia may find that their menstrual period or the start of menopause can cause a fibro flare.

Dietary Changes

There are some foods that may affect some with fibromyalgia. Some have been affected by dairy, gluten, MSG, refined sugar, or caffeine. Also, any food sensitivities that you have could trigger a fibromyalgia flare.

Talk to your doctor about keeping a food diary or trying an elimination diet. This could help you to pinpoint which foods, if any, affect you.

Inadequate Sleep

Getting a good night sleep is vital for your body to repair itself and for proper function. However, it is common for people with fibromyalgia to have frequent disruptions of the sleep cycle, preventing them from getting restful and restorative sleep.

Not getting the right amount of sleep can trigger a flare-up. Finding a good sleep routine and sticking to it may help improve some of your symptoms and reduce fibro flares.

Other Triggers May Include

- **Changes in the weather can often cause extra pain or other symptoms.** The change in barometric pressure when it rains can affect us; as can changes in temperature.
- **Illness or injury.** Illnesses like the common cold or the flu may trigger a flare-up. Injuries can also cause a flare.
- **Sensory overload**. Many with fibromyalgia are extremely sensitive to lights, sounds, and even smells. For some sensory overload may trigger a flare-up.
- **For some traveling can cause a fibromyalgia flare.** Sitting too long while driving or flying; a change of sleep schedule or diet; or the stress of being in a different environment can have a negative effect on some, leading to a flare-up.

It can be difficult to know what has caused a fibromyalgia flare, and some have found it useful to keep a journal of their symptoms.

This can help to be more aware of what you are feeling and to notice any patterns there may be in your symptoms. Some apps are made for this purpose.

Next page: How to cope with a fibromyalgia flare-up and post-flare care.

How to Cope During a Fibromyalgia Flare-Up

Coping during a flare-up can be a real challenge, there are a few things that could potentially help you to reduce some of your symptoms and possibly even shorten the length of your flare.

Be Gentle With Yourself

Do not push yourself. Go slow. Be gentle with yourself. If you can’t do the laundry for a few days, that’s okay. Also, if you can’t get the house cleaned this week, that’s okay.

If you have to cancel plans, that's okay, do not feel guilty about it. Treat yourself the same way you would a friend that was going through a hard time.

Communicate Your Needs With Family, Friends and Coworkers

Let the people in your life know that you are going through an especially hard time. If there are practical things you need help with, ask for it.

If you need time away from work, or simply a lighter workload, be upfront with your boss and any coworkers this may affect. This may help relieve, or avoid altogether, some stressful situations.

Stick to Your Normal Sleep Schedule

As already mentioned, sleep plays a vital role in our health and well-being, especially when you have fibromyalgia. Getting sleep and rest is important and sticking to your sleep routine will help your body heal and repair itself faster.

Stick to Your Medication and Supplement Schedule

When you feel awful and are exhausted, it can be hard to remember everything you need to do. Speaking from personal experience, I know even something as routine as taking your pills can slip through the cracks.

During a flare, it is more important than ever that you continue taking medicine or supplements. This will help to manage your symptoms and get you feeling better sooner.

Stay Hydrated and Eat Healthy Food

We know that drinking plenty of water and eating a healthy diet can have a big effect on our health. During a flare, it can be hard to fix yourself healthy meals.

It may be tempting to reach for convenient snacks or food that we find comforting. However, those things may cause you to feel worse or prolong the flare up.

Eating as healthy as you can help you to feel better sooner. It helps to have a few healthy meals set aside in the freezer for the especially difficult days.

Gentle Stretches

When you are going through a flare, exercise is likely the farthest thing from your mind. But getting in a few stretches each day may help. As tempting as it is, sitting or lying down too much can make your flare worse or last longer.

Remember, There Is Only So Much That You Can Do

There is only so much that can be done to bring relief while you are living through a flare. Much of it is just a waiting game, hoping it will be over soon. The best thing that can be done at this point is to keep yourself as distracted as possible.

Focusing your attention on positive, enjoyable things may help your mental wellbeing during this time. Read a book, binge watch your favorite TV show, listen to your favorite music, watch funny videos of cute animals, play games or use coloring apps on your phone. Spend time outside if it is possible for you to do so, nature can be a powerful healer.

I am well aware that all of the above suggestions are much easier said than done. I have often found that while living through a flare up my main priority is just survival.

If I can keep myself alive from one day to the next, then hopefully the next day will be better. And that is okay. If all you did today was survive, that is okay, that is important!

Recovering from a Fibromyalgia Flare-Up

During a flare, it is easy to become overwhelmed. You may begin to feel like the flare-up is going to last forever, that this is just how you are going to feel from now on. I have been there. But I can assure you, and the flare-up will end. You will have better days again.

Once you do begin to feel better, it is crucial that you do not push yourself too hard right away. Ease yourself back into your usual routine. Doing too much too soon can lead you right back into another flare up.