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5 Ways To Control Fibromyalgia With Diet

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New research shows that picking these foods may ease pain

Eat for pain relief

Fibromyalgia, a chronic disease that causes pain and swelling in more than a dozen points all over the body, affects as many as 5 million people. Because doctors are still unsure of the cause of fibromyalgia, treatment can be frustrating (and often a process of trial and error).

"Fibromyalgia symptoms are only about 30% amenable to current pharmaceutical strategies on the market," says Kathleen Holton, PhD, MPH, lead author of *Potential Dietary Links in Central Sensitization in Fibromyalgia*. That's why many patients are taking matters into their own hands and experimenting with alternative treatments, including dietary changes. Forty-two percent of fibro patients reported that symptoms worsened after eating certain foods, and though much of the research is in its preliminary phases, there's some evidence that simple diet tweaks may ease fibro pain. Read on to get five food rules for fibromyalgia patients. Just be sure to consult your doctor before drastically changing your diet.

1. Load up on vitamin D

Many adults are deficient in vitamin D to begin with, but this sunshine vitamin can be vital to fibro patients. "Vitamin D deficiency can mimic some of the symptoms of fibromyalgia. All patients should be screened for deficiency," says Holton. Studies show that vitamin D deficiencies can cause bone and muscle pain, and upping levels of this hard-to-get vitamin may help. A 2008 study found that pain patients with low levels of vitamin D required almost double the dose of painkillers as those with adequate levels. Holton recommends taking a supplement, especially during the wintertime.

2. Avoid additives

Common food additives, like monosodium glutamate (MSG) and aspartame, can act as excitotoxin molecules, a chemical group that has the ability to activate neurons that increase sensitivity to pain. Anecdotally, easing off these additives can help, and one very small study of four patients found that eliminating MSG and aspartame resulted in a reduction of fibromyalgia symptoms. The research is far from definitive, but it may be worth trying if you notice your symptoms worsen after Chinese takeout or too many diet drinks.

3. Say yes to fish

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 3 months of supplementing omega-3 fatty acids, symptoms such as morning stiffness and painful, tender joints decreased. Though this study did not include fibromyalgia patients (it included rheumatoid arthritis (RA), irritable bowel syndrome (IBD), and dysmenorrheal patients), the results show promise. Fibro patients often have co-morbidities such as IBD and RA, so omega-3s may benefit them as well. Try adding salmon or walnuts to your diet, or, if you don't like those foods, try adding flaxseeds to your cereal or oatmeal.

More from Prevention: [10 Facts About Fibromyalgia](#)

4. Nix the caffeine

Because sleeplessness is commonly associated with fibro, it may be tempting to fuel up on coffee to get through the day. This, however, may be a mistake. "Some patients use caffeine to compensate for not sleeping well, which can lead to a circular problem where the 'solution' of

taking caffeine to stay awake is actually causing the problem of not sleeping at night," says Holton. Caffeine can set you up for a crash and, if sipped later in the day, may disrupt sleep schedules. Holton recommends antioxidant-packed decaffeinated green tea as a healthier alternative.

5. Veg out

Some researchers speculate that oxidative stress may be a cause of fibro symptoms. Oxidative stress occurs when the body doesn't produce enough antioxidants to battle cell-damaging free radicals in the body. Most fruits and veggies are packed with important antioxidants, like vitamins A, C, and E, which fight free radicals to keep your body normalized. Certain studies also show a raw, vegan diet can improve symptoms, but that's difficult for most people to follow. If you do choose to eat meat, though, opt for a small portion of grass-fed beef. "It is an excellent source of iron and vitamin B12, both nutrients which are extremely important in keeping your pain-processing nervous system healthy," says Holton.

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