

# *COPING*

Fibromyalgia  Network  
Treatment & Research News Since 1988

# Coping Strategies

---

## Contents

Avoid Self-doubt.....	2
Like Yourself .....	3
Initiate Friendly Discussion .....	5
Here is what you might say to initiate a friendly discussion: .....	5
Only You Know How it Feels .....	5
For example: .....	5
Photography.....	7
Dancing .....	7
Learning Something New.....	8
Gift-Making Throughout the Year.....	8
Herb & Flower Gardens .....	9
Writing .....	9
Relax and Sleep.....	14
Hot and Cold Therapy .....	15
Soothing Rubs .....	15
Comforts of Home.....	16
Diet.....	17
Exercise .....	18

**Coping with fibromyalgia is particularly difficult because the symptoms are invisible and chronic. A person can't simply "get over" fibromyalgia with the passage of time or wishful thinking.**

**Fibromyalgia Association UK does not endorse or recommend any particular treatment, therapy or practitioner. Any advice or recommendation of a medical or legal nature must always be discussed with a qualified professional. The Trustees, employees and/or volunteers of FMA UK cannot be held liable for information given, or for the results of therapies, treatments etc. which may be discussed or presented in communications originating from FMA UK. Views expressed are not necessarily those of FMA UK, the Trustees, employees or volunteers. The accuracy of any information given is not guaranteed: you should always make your own full enquiries before acting on such information.**

**Where links are made to other websites or mention made of other organisations, these are provided for information only; FMA UK may not support or endorse any information, services or treatments which may be encountered as a result of visiting or contacting them. You should always make your own full enquiries before taking action.**

## **Believe in Yourself—Steering Clear of Self-Doubt and Destructive Thoughts**

---



How do you believe in yourself when others trivialize your symptoms? Or how do you continue to like yourself when fibromyalgia keeps stealing your energy and ability to function as you once did? These situations fuel on-going battles and undermine your self-esteem. But no matter what others say or do, it is essential that you believe in yourself.

---

Some people just don't get fibro, or refuse to accept such a debilitating illness that they cannot see. Adding to your frustrations: you don't have a lab test, X-ray, or other form of proof that all of your symptoms are real. But only you can hang onto your conviction that science will eventually vindicate you. In the meantime, you have to be kind to yourself.

### **Avoid Self-doubt**

“Am I really sick? Did I do something to cause this? If I had eaten better, exercised more, been more positive, would I be well today?”

Anyone who begins each day with pain all over is rightfully convinced that something is wrong. But when a doctor can't find anything and the family members grow suspicious, it is difficult not to doubt yourself.

Try to recognize self-doubting or self-blaming thoughts as quickly as you can. We talk to ourselves all day long. When you ache everywhere and no one understands your need to rest, putting a halt to the negative chatter can take time and practice. Learn to talk to yourself with the same caring tone you would speak to a good friend. You didn't cause your fibromyalgia, so don't take the blame for it. You need to be comforted. You deserve it, especially from yourself.

When possible, express your need for understanding and validation to family members and friends, at least the ones you trust to listen and be in your corner. A good support system can help you keep your fighting spirit alive. If the people close to you are insensitive (more common than it should be), check out our Facebook page for daily encouragement and a social network of people who know what you are going through.

### **Like Yourself**

“How can I look attractive when I feel so physically ill? Who will employ me when I require a flexible schedule? I used to get so much done each day, but now my ‘to do list’ is half the length. Why can't I just push through this illness?”

Persistent self-doubt can snowball into feelings of dislike. It's difficult to respect yourself and accept your limits when you are overwhelmed with constant misgivings about your condition. This is especially true when these inner doubts are further fuelled by the scepticism of others.

Liking yourself is a battle many people struggle with, not just those who have fibromyalgia or other chronic illnesses. It's hard not to be judgmental. Deep down, you may be thinking, “My house is a mess” or “I'm not as physically fit as I should be” or “I used to make a lot more money.” The only solution is to let go of who you once were and try to embrace the person you are today.

Liking who you are is a challenge, especially if you make comparisons to your former, younger self (most people, even those without fibro, would fail to measure up). Talk to yourself with a kind, inner voice and appreciate what you can do without focusing on the negatives. Of course, nothing is easy about this quest and it can't be rushed. Hopefully, over time, you will learn to let go of self-criticism and you will start liking yourself.

# Relationships

---



Healthy relationships are difficult for anyone to maintain, and people with fibromyalgia face the added complications imposed by a chronic illness. Your altered lifestyle and physical limitations, along with other people's lack of understanding, may create turbulence in your relationships.

Overcoming these problems is essential for people with chronic illnesses, as they need the emotional support of family and friends.

## Reducing Feelings of Resentment in Your Relationship

---



Having fibromyalgia in a partnership or marriage can dramatically change the relationship. Simple tasks that you both took for granted—mobility, housework, finances, social activities, and even making plans for the future—may be side-tracked.

As household duties back up and the partner with fibromyalgia tries to take care of themselves, the other person in the relationship often feels overwhelmed trying to manage a larger chunk of daily responsibilities. Both parties tend to hide their emotions. The partner who is taking on more duties can begin to feel frustrated, disappointed, sad, or lonely. These feelings can lead to anger or resentment.

As the person with fibromyalgia, you may feel guilty and unsure about how to initiate a conversation about the obvious changes in our relationship, but silence can make you and

your partner feel more awkward. Here are some strategies to improve communications and handle feelings of resentment with your partner:

### **Initiate Friendly Discussion**

If the partner who is ill makes a loving effort to initiate discussion that will bring up the spouse's feelings, the relationship can take a more constructive and supportive course, says Thomas Fuller, Ph.D., a psychologist in Grand Rapids, MI.

"This isn't an easy topic with an easy fix," Fuller says. "I think the real key is for couples to talk about issues openly and without penalty so things don't get all bottled up." Also, you have to consider that while you are dealing with pain; your spouse's life has changed, too.

"Don't be defensive about your illness or the situation, and accept that your spouse's efforts, feelings, and struggles are normal. Validate their experience. Verbally appreciate what your spouse is doing to accommodate the situation." Let them know you recognize the greater effort they are putting forth.

### **Here is what you might say to initiate a friendly discussion:**

"I know that you are disappointed right now. I know that you love me and are trying not to blame me for being ill. I am so lucky to have a spouse who takes care of things like you do. I am so lucky to have you."

### **Only You Know How it Feels**

"Open and honest communication is the best protection against the inevitable hurt and anger that can damage a relationship," says Connie O'Reilly, Ph.D., a psychologist in Beaverton, OR. "Only you know what it feels like to be in your body, yet it is important that you make a good faith effort to contribute to the household chores, even in small ways. And at the end of a day when your spouse walks in the door and you both realize you've not been able to do all each of you had hoped, remember that you are not responsible for anyone's feeling but your own. Acknowledge the situation, accept that it's okay, and remain optimistic."

### **For example:**

"I realize I did not accomplish many of the tasks I had hoped today. I can understand that you may be disappointed and frustrated. So am I. I plan to go to bed early tonight and try again tomorrow."

Suggest trading some duties and consider all options. While you both struggle to manage the house, parenting and finances, keep in mind the social aspects of a relationship can also suffer. See our articles on [Socializing](#) and [New Hobbies \(Daily Living\)](#), to help you as a couple and on an individual basis reap enjoyment out of life.

# Create a Social Life

---



Supportive social contact is a huge buffer against a chronic illness like fibromyalgia, says Connie O'Reilly, Ph.D., of Beaverton, OR. But couples may have to rethink and recreate a social life based on new realities. On an individual basis, patients may need to consider new pastimes that are fun but don't drain their energy bank or overwork sore muscles (see the article on New Hobbies).

"Develop new mutual interests," O'Reilly suggests to help couples maintain a social life. "The kind of socializing may be different than it was before the illness." It's important to continue to make plans, but be sure to have contingency plans for those inevitable disruptions because of pain or fatigue. Be prepared to be flexible with a time or date, or take a rain check.

"You need to try to let go of this idea that you can or should try to prevent someone else from being upset or disappointed," O'Reilly says. Pushing yourself to meet social commitments will only make your fibromyalgia worse. And it's also important to let your partner do what he needs to do to achieve his social needs.

"Your job is to engage in good self-care so that you don't feel jealous or resentful when your partner does choose to go out without you. Your partner's job is to decide what he needs to do to make certain he takes care of himself," she says.

"Needs for the couple to socialize together shouldn't be relegated to the trash heap," says Don Uslan, M.A., M.B.A., L.M.H.C., a therapist in Seattle, WA. "Couples who are not used to individual socializing may have a very difficult time with this concept. But there aren't a lot of choices. Either the well spouse learns to do certain things alone or with her own group of friends, so she can meet some social needs and lessen any possible resentment. Or the couple will have to learn to enjoy and accept a less active form of socializing together."

There are challenges in living with a chronic illness that "good will and good intentions cannot solve on their own," says Uslan. This is when couples therapy or professional counselling may be needed.

Barbara Suter, Ph.D., a therapist in New York City, says, in addition, an outside support group could act as psychological support for the well spouse to let-off steam or even be a social outlet. And "if time is too limited, perhaps an online group could be an option."

"A couple may be fortunate enough to go for many years before a major challenge strikes. Or it may be early in the relationship," Uslan says. "If you didn't come down with fibromyalgia,

it might have been something else, cardiac problems or severe back pain. The end result is the same. Either both parties are in it for the long haul, or one partner will try to find some way out, usually by blaming the person with the illness for some failure of not living up to the relationship contract. So, if it's clear that both parties are in it for the long haul, they just need tools and techniques to figure out how to cope.”

## Fibro-Friendly Hobbies and Pastimes

---



One of the challenges of adjusting to fibromyalgia is finding hobbies and pastimes that don't aggravate your symptoms. Better yet, you want to seek out activities that provide you with gratification and distraction from the pain. The Fibromyalgia Network surveyed its Members and here are a few of the most endorsed fibro-friendly pastimes:

### **Photography**

One person who took photography lessons at the local community college said she carries a camera in her purse all the time. “I never know where the right picture will happen ... I also shop for unusual frames to keep my pictures in or to give them away to family members or close friends.”

A second patient said: “When I took my first photography class several years ago from our local nature center, little did I know the benefits it would offer now that I have fibro.” As she strolls with her husband around the parks, she shoots pictures of birds and beautiful scenes. “I can soon forget how bad I hurt ... nature is very relaxing.”

“During the first three years following the injury that led to my fibromyalgia, I gave up softball, work, fishing, hiking, writing, and training my children for sports,” said a parent trying to adjust to fibro. “Then I remembered my camera and rediscovered how much I love watching the helicopters land and take off at the local hospital. Now on the weekends, I take my files from work, my dog, and my camera to the hospital parking lot. I work until a chopper is coming in or out. The pictures are wonderful and make me feel accomplished. I still miss softball and get angry about my pain and limitations. But now I realize I have choices and can do something I enjoy.”

## **Dancing**

Dancing of all types provides aerobic exercise, if you are up to it. You may also just try “going through the motions” for the social benefits that various types of group dancing can offer. Contact your local community centers for activity listings.

“My main distraction is Country Western line dancing,” said one patient. “It gets me moving with all the pleasure and none of the sweat of regular exercise. Although my husband and I both dance, it is not necessary to have a partner.”

“My favorite distraction is square dancing!” exclaimed one Member. “It’s not just for old folks anymore. It’s good clean fun and you’d never know that you walked three miles in an evening. One of the first calls you learn is a “yellow rock” which means hug the person you’re looking at. No alcohol is allowed because you have to be able to follow directions (hopefully your attention isn’t too bothered by fibro-fog). It’s teamwork in action, plus food, friends and exercise.”

## **Learning Something New**

One patient recommended taking a new class each session at a local community college or arts school. It shouldn’t be boring or something you do by yourself ... take a class with a friend. You might start out with a short course in history to learn about your ancestors or a class in calligraphy—just try a topic that strikes you as fun.

Regarding this last suggestion, one patient stated: “I was interested in calligraphy, but I didn’t know if I could do something that exacting with my hands, which tire and cramp easily. But, what the heck, I wanted to see if I could do it. With practice, I discovered that I was fairly good! Now I incorporate calligraphy into handmade cards for the holidays ... a papermaking workshop last fall added another dimension to my artwork and cards.”

## **Gift-Making Throughout the Year**

Specially made gifts often provoke kind or loving feelings. It signals that a person went out of their way to make something just for you. Many patients suggested a fun way to get ready for the holidays is gift-making done throughout the year. Make a list of the people who you wish to give presents to and then as a year-around hobby, start making them gifts.

“Bargains from flea markets and garage sales are what I dress up to make presents. Sale items help my pocketbook; already worn thin from the cost of medications. A touch of lace, a bit of ribbon, some fancy buttons and ideas from women’s magazines can create unique ‘made myself’ gifts.”

Use the arts, crafts and hobbies you have learned (such as stamp-making and calligraphy) to make gift-giving special. As the season rolls around, you will be able to enjoy it instead of wearing yourself out at the shopping malls.

## Herb & Flower Gardens

Squatting down to flowerbeds may make your muscles more sore. Instead, patients suggested lining the sill of your kitchen window or a ledge on your patio with small pots. Fill the bottom of a few plastic containers with two inches with small stones for water drainage. Use potting soil mixed with sand for the rest. Common herbs to grow are: parsley, oregano, thyme, sage, and spearmint. “There is nothing that can quite compare with the flavor of food or a cup of tea prepared with fresh picked herbs,” said one patient. And if you want color, many patients recommended adding small seasonal flowers or decorating the pots.

## Writing

Writing can be a creative outlet for many people. One patient who used to be a physical education teacher and dancer, decided she needed to focus on something else. “Since I couldn’t dance professionally anymore, I decided to teach myself creative writing with some help from several community center classes. They were laid-back and non-competitive. I only sit at my computer for 15 minutes at a time and write anything that comes into my head. Two writing sessions a day helps takes my mind off the pain.”

# Daily Living

## Hurdling Painful Flare-ups

---



How do you stay calm when the pain is so great that it is just about ready to push you over the edge of sanity? The moment that you sense your pain is starting to intensify, here are a few suggestions that might help you hurdle your next flare-up and, hopefully, ease its impact.

Schedule more sleeping time. Either go to bed earlier or arrange to sleep in. If you are having increased difficulties sleeping, you might call your physician’s office for advice about medications that your doctor can prescribe to help in the short-term.

Increase the number and length of relaxation breaks you take. In other words, treat your body with as much TLC as you can.

Avoid confrontations and stress (both physically and emotionally). If possible, put family and work problems on the back burner. You can solve them, along with the world’s woes, at some later date when you are feeling better. However, if a problem is beginning to fester

inside of you, let it out. Talk to a spouse or friend whom you can trust. Some people find that venting their problems on paper helps them rationalize the situation and gain a better perspective on what is eating away at them.

Ease up a bit on your weekly exercise routine (if you have one), but don't totally abandon it because it will be too difficult to crank up the old routine again when you are feeling better.

If you or a close friend/neighbour has a hot tub, try to spend some time relaxing in it each day. Otherwise, take frequent, long hot showers. Warm water can be soothing to painful muscles. Depending on your past experience, massages and other types of hands-on therapies may bring you relief as well.

Try to engage in activities that help take your mind off the pain. Also try doing things that give you a sense of gratification; this type of positive reinforcement will help you be more optimistic about your future. Some people put things aside to do for rainy days; you might want to consider putting things aside for your painful days!

## Handling Gloomy Days

---



One patient wrote to us asking: “How are we supposed to deal with the cold winter days ahead when the sun doesn't shine?” Good question. It's hard to keep an upbeat attitude if it looks gloomy outside, especially when your chronic symptoms are already negatively impacting your mood.

If you find yourself struggling to maintain a positive outlook at any time of the year, consider using some of the self-help tips provided below to stay entertained and help keep your mind off your fibromyalgia symptoms.

- Call friends
- Get on the Internet and chat with other patients through Facebook and other social networks.
- Write to people you miss seeing ... maybe they'll write back to you too.
- Plan ahead for a simple weekend activity that involves other people (many support groups meet on the weekends).
- Go out for Saturday lunch or Sunday brunch – meals you don't have to prepare.
- Pick an interesting topic that you want to know more about and read up on it. If you don't find yourself looking forward to learning more about it each night, the topic isn't right or this idea isn't for you.

- Learn a new art, craft, or hobby on the weekends that you can do indoors at night. You will lose track of time and end up with a sense of gratification at the completion of each project. Make up for the dreary outside by having plenty of light in your home for these activities (e.g., 100 watt bulbs or halogens for that ball-field effect).

## Family Involvement

---



Expert advice from Leslie Epstein, M.S., MFCC

While only one person in a family may suffer from fibromyalgia the entire family is affected by it. Your family faces a troublesome time while learning to cope with the anxieties, fears and trauma produced by fibromyalgia. Thus, it is essential that the family become part of your therapeutic program. More explicitly, family support is crucial to the successful management of any chronic and painful condition.

A common problem for patients is disassociation, where a family member may want to deny that there is anything wrong with you. That family member seems to feel that if he/she pretends nothing serious exists, the illness and its problems will go away. This type of person rationalizes that “if there is nothing I can do (about my loved one having fibromyalgia), I may as well act as if nothing is wrong and go on living my own life.” The patient, in turn, resents this apparent disinterest and interprets it incorrectly to mean that their family member does not care, creating added stress.

Open communication among family members is important. The family must learn to discuss all feelings that arise, including frustration, resentment and impatience. Expression must not be restricted. The patient should be comfortable discussing personal needs and feelings with the family, and the converse should also be true. In this connection, it is vital that changes in family roles and responsibilities be discussed openly in order to prevent repressed anger and resentment, since hostile family attitudes may cause a patient’s symptoms to flare.

The difficulty seems to be in finding the best response at a particular time: empathy when the symptoms appear to be worse; support during times of fear and crisis; and allowing patient control in periods when they are feeling better. Thus, a good system of communication within your family is essential.

Finally, family members are not immune to depression. It is frustrating to watch people who are sick and in pain, and yet to have little control over their illness. This can anger family members, who typically are unwilling to vent their frustrations onto you for fear of inducing

more stress and causing an exacerbation of your condition. Instead, the family member's anger turns inward, creating depression.

## Patient Rights & Second Medical Opinions

---



Even if you are in excruciating pain, you cannot force your doctor to prescribe a pain medication for you or refer you to a pain specialist. Timothy McCall, M.D., an internist and patient advocate, suggests relaying the seriousness of your pain to your doctor by creating an image. “Give specific examples from your life about how your pain affects you,” says McCall. If you claim, “I am in such terrible pain, it hurts so bad that you can’t imagine how awful I feel,” McCall says this is ‘telling’ and it is useless for conveying how seriously your symptoms are impacting your function. If you are concerned about the pain in your hands, you could say, “I have so much pain that I cannot button my blouse (or shirt).” This provides your doctor with a clear picture (e.g., showing) rather than merely stating you have hand pain (e.g., telling).

Jennifer Schneider, M.D., Ph.D., a pain and addiction specialist says “most doctors prefer black-and-white situations.” This is why they are comfortable prescribing opioids to cancer patients, but they may say ‘no’ when it comes to patients with fibromyalgia.” If your doctor is unwilling to consider opioids when ‘everything else’ has failed,” says Schneider, “your best bet is to ask the physician to refer you to a pain specialist.”

What do you do if your physician gives up on you, tells you that there is nothing else that can be done, or refuses to follow through with the treatment plan suggested by the pain specialist you were referred to? Asserting your rights may require you to fire your doctor if he or she is completely uncooperative ... but it all depends on the situation.

If you harbour doubts about a diagnosis or you feel a different treatment avenue should be tried, you would be wise to seek a second medical opinion. Yet, asking for it may not be easy. Don Uslan, M.A., L.M.H.C., says that the words “second opinion” can imply a “no-vote” of confidence in your doctor and may irritate even the most compassionate provider. Uslan says one way to approach this sensitive situation might be to bring in an article from a reputable source about a therapy or test you wish to try. This allows your physician time to digest the new material and shows that you are still appreciative of his or her care.

# Feeling Negative About Your Illness Outlook?

---



“Do you know what my fibromyalgia is?” one mother inquisitively asked her young daughter. “Yes, mommy, it’s what makes you grumpy!”

An optimistic person might say that there’s a silver lining to everything in life; you just have to look for it. But searching for life’s fulfilment isn’t easy, and it can be especially difficult if you have a chronic illness that interferes with your daily activities. Yet, keeping a positive outlook may be your best survival tactic for learning to live with your illness.

Sure, you have ample cause to feel angry, frustrated, and grumpy about your fibromyalgia or chronic fatigue syndrome. For many, fibromyalgia is like a bad dream that has come true. But do you think your family, friends or co-workers like to see you gloomy? No! They would prefer to be around someone who is happy, someone who exudes cheerfulness. Friends may not tell you to get a better attitude ... that would be insensitive and rude. Instead, they may simply choose to keep their distance and leave you alone!

But you don’t want to be left alone. You need your family and friends to help cheer you up and get through the bad times—whether they be the financial strain of medical bills or the fibromyalgia symptoms themselves. So appearing down and out (regardless of how you feel), isn’t to your advantage.

Here are just a few tips on how to keep a positive outlook:

- Refuse to worry about any negative elements in your life that are beyond your control. Too many negative thoughts can land you in the dumps emotionally, but it takes continuous effort on your part to prevent unpleasanties from crowding your outlook on life.
- Do not take on other people’s problems. You have all you can handle keeping your own focus positive.
- Save a few minutes each day to visualize the world around you, and try to think of at least one way to make your outlook brighter.
- When anticipating what lies ahead in a day, think about the good things that can happen. Beginning each day with an optimistic thought can actually help you make it through the day.

- When replaying the events of a day, think about your accomplishments. Sure, you could have done more, but don't think about that! Even healthy people wish they could get more done in a day, so don't get caught up in that line of thinking.
- Share what you are learning about attitude with the person you care most about.
- Maybe you can help them adjust their attitude and you both will be a lot happier!
- Changing your outlook and building a positive attitude with a chronic illness is no easy task, but it can greatly improve your life. You can keep your old friends (if you want) and make new ones as well. You can change the way people view you, and they certainly won't associate your fibromyalgia with grumpiness!

## Living Aids

---

Making even small changes in your day-to-day living, working, and functioning can make positive improvements. Fibromyalgia Network discusses self-help aids in on-going articles recommended to us by fibromyalgia patients. Look for aids that take the strain off your body and put you more at ease. Adapt slowly and keep your mind open to new possibilities. You can be surprised at what can work for you. A sampling of suggestions are listed below.

### Relax and Sleep



Do you wake up feeling like you got run over by that Mack truck? Good sleep is a key to feeling more refreshed tomorrow. Fibromyalgia patients tell us that you don't have to spend a fortune on a new mattress to get snuggled and comfortable. A thick foam or feather topper or eggcrate mattress overlay can make a world of difference without costing you an arm or a leg. Just think warm and soft for sleep, or relaxing. Other suggestions include:

- heated mattress pad
- body pillow
- contour memory foam head & neck pillow
- soft pillows for sleeping or other support
- fluffy socks for cold feet

- electric blankets

## Hot and Cold Therapy



While most fibromyalgia patients prefer warm therapies, some choose the comfort they receive from cold treatments. Either way, various products can target warmth or coolness to virtually any body part. If you don't have access to a hot tub, then a warm bath, or hot shower with a sitting stool can be very accommodating. If you don't have a fancy cold pack, a bag of frozen peas can contour and cool.

- hot patches
- heating cream, odor free
- Epsom salt for bath or feet
- gel freezer packs
- Bed Buddy reusable, microwavable wraps, pictured
- hot water inflatable spa

## Soothing Rubs



Sometimes a little gel or soothing cream can target that irritating burn, itch, or pain of sensitive skin. Look around your favorite drug store for scentless topicals. Ask your pharmacist about over-the-counter products that can provide you some relief. Or talk with your doctor about prescription medications that are applied topically.

- Thera-gesic or Sombra heating cream, gel, or roll on
- Salonpas over-the-counter pain relief patches
- analgesic patches or or creams (may contains lidocaine or anti-inflammatory medicines)

- various cooling gels or creams
- Preparation H Ointment or Lanacaine anti-itch products
- generic benzocaine skin products for a numbing effect
- over the counter hydrocortisone cream can also soothe the itch and other skin irritations
- Smooth on your skin some corn starch on hot nights

## Comforts of Home



Look around your house and see what's causing you anguish, then think about making your life easier, safer, and more supportive. These comforts don't have to be expensive, just accommodating to your needs. Examples include:

- a comfortable stool in the kitchen for sitting
- massage or heated seat cushions for home or car
- a recliner for whole body support
- sole inserts for shoes and slippers
- lumbar support pillows for driving and sitting
- toilet seat riser
- shower seat and extension hose/spray
- back or neck brace
- overstuffed furniture (you can never have too much cushiony support)
- loose snugly clothing

# Diet & Exercise

---



A balanced plan for treating fibromyalgia should include both drug and nondrug therapies. Exercise, in particular, has been touted as a nondrug treatment for fibromyalgia. If approached the wrong way, however, exercise can cause pain and other symptoms of fibromyalgia to flare. Be cautious of healthcare providers who tell you that exercise is the key to treating your fibromyalgia (they are not being realistic), but if done properly, exercise can help you stay fit and maintain a better quality of life. Similarly, a well-planned diet with the right nutritional supplements will help optimize your health.

## Diet

Is there a diet that will “cure” fibromyalgia? No. However, a diet full of fruits and vegetables may supply your body with additional antioxidants and nutrients

like malic acid found in apples, and calcium found in deep green vegetables. Antioxidants are considered to be beneficial for minimizing the destructive effects that can occur in tissues when the body generates certain reactive chemicals, called free radicals. An excess of free radicals is harmful to the tissues, which is likely why researchers have discovered that reduced antioxidant protection corresponds to greater muscle pain, and increased fatigue levels.

Doctors recommend that you try to minimize the amounts of preservatives or chemicals that you consume in your diet. This is because your body will require more antioxidants to clear them from your system, and many patients are chemically sensitive. Moreover, there are certain chemicals in foods that tend to cause more problems or magnify fibromyalgia symptoms, such as aspartame, commonly known on the supermarket shelf as Equal or NutraSweet.

In addition to a healthy diet, several vitamins and nutritional supplements have been found to be beneficial for a variety of chemical imbalances to help you improve the quality of your life. For example, melatonin is known to improve the quality of your sleep, although it may not be a strong enough hypnotic to get you to sleep. Vinpocetine, a substance extracted from

the periwinkle plant, has been known for years to improve brain function. Supplements also can help with gastrointestinal distress, muscle function, fibro-fog, and fatigue.

## Exercise



Exercise will help you stay functional while giving you that positive mental boost. It is also known to decrease anxiety and depression, which can negatively impact the way you cope with your symptoms. Doctors agree that aerobic exercise increases blood flow and oxygen to the muscles and surrounding tissues to help nourish them. It also improves circulation, regulates blood pressure and body weight, and strengthens the heart, among other benefits. While this is all well and good, how will you face the challenge of beginning an exercise program without throwing your body into a flare up?

You need to take a mindful approach of what you are physically doing:

- Work with your doctor or physical therapist before starting any exercise program
- Avoid intense activity
- Think “moderate” exercise
- Understand your limitations
- Choose activities you can do and enjoy doing
- Start slowly in short increments of activity coupled with rest and build up slowly
- Stretch properly before each activity

In addition, there are several therapies involving massage, yoga, and self-help aids to ease soreness that may arise from exercise.

**Please remember before you begin to take any over the counter medication or undertake any complementary therapy of any kind to always discuss what you are thinking about doing with a member of your medical professional management team.**