



Natural Cure To Fibromyalgia



Tackling 15 Common Fibromyalgia Triggers

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Contents page

Introduction	2
Trigger Foods to Avoid	3
Environmental Triggers	4
- Stress	4
- Changes in Barometric Pressure	5
- Cold or Cold Weather	6
- Lack of Sleep	7
- Damp Air / Wet Weather	8
- Sensitivity to smells	8
- Chemicals	9
- Over Doing it	10
- Menstrual Cycle / PMS	11
- Bright Lights / Sunshine	11
- Strenuous Exercise	11
- Getting Too Hot	13
- Underactivity	14
- Sitting on Hard Chairs	14

Hello, my name's Jane Thompson and I'm the author of the top-selling downloadable book the [Natural Cure to Fibromyalgia](#).

In March 2008 I surveyed 2931 people who had either bought my downloadable book or were subscribed to my Natural Cure to Fibromyalgia newsletter.

As a result of feedback I received from the survey it was clear that one of the most frustrating aspects of Fibromyalgia was the unpredictability of the symptoms and when they would strike.

So, to answer this concern I have pulled together this comprehensive resource covering triggers that lead to a flare up of Fibromyalgia symptoms, including both food items and environmental factors.

There is also a review of the various environmental triggers with suggestions for overcoming these factors.

It is worth bearing in mind that as each person presents symptoms in a different way, some of the triggers listed here may not be a problem for you. Therefore, some trial and error may be required to get the best results.

I hope you enjoy this report and find the information you need to gain relief from your symptoms.

To your good health,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jane Thompson". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Trigger Foods To Avoid

The foods below are ones that have been highlighted as common ‘trigger’ foods by Fibromyalgia sufferers. Generally they have been reported as aggravating Fibromyalgia symptoms in many sufferers. However, as everyone reacts differently you may wish to experiment to see if these foods are suitable for you. A food diary is a great way to do this as you can keep track of foods and beverages alongside any symptoms they may aggravate or cause. Over time this process can identify those foods and beverages that are not suitable for you.

Common Foods to Avoid

<p>FRUITS / VEGETABLES:</p> <p>Tomatoes Potatoes Eggplant (Aubergine) Citric fruits Corn</p> <p>DAIRY:</p> <p>Cheese (including aged cheese with mold) Milk</p> <p>SWEETS / DESSERT / BAKERY:</p> <p>Sugar /Sugary foods Wheat/Bread Chocolate White flour Simple Carbohydrates</p> <p>OTHER:</p> <p>High Fat Foods Caffeine Foods containing yeast Salt</p>	<p>PREPARED FOODS:</p> <p>Processed meat Flavorings/Colorings/ Preservatives Junk/Fast Food Fried Foods Foods containing MSG (monosodium glutamate) Aspartame/sugar substitutes Corn syrup Spicy Foods</p> <p>MEAT / FISH / PROTEINS:</p> <p>Red Meat Pork Beef Shellfish/Fish Eggs</p> <p>BEVERAGES:</p> <p>Alcohol Coffee Soda / fizzy drinks Citric fruit drinks</p>
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Environmental Triggers

Environmental triggers can be just as problematic as food triggers and in many cases even more so. They can also be harder to control. Below is a list of common environmental triggers as reported in a survey of Fibromyalgia sufferers and supported by extensive research. They are listed in order with the most commonly stated trigger first.

- Stress
- Changes in barometric pressure
- Cold or Cold Weather
- Lack of Sleep
- Damp Air/Wet Weather
- Sensitivity to smells
- Chemicals
- Overdoing it
- Menstrual Cycle/ PMS
- Bright Lights
- Strenuous Exercise
- Sunshine
- Change in temperature
- Getting too Hot
- Under-activity
- Sitting on hard chairs

Stress

People with fibromyalgia have poor functioning of the HPA axis (hypophysis-pituitary-adrenal axis) which is our body's system for responding to stress and associated with the release of neurochemicals like adrenaline and serotonin. It is not yet fully known how pain sensation and an abnormal stress response are related, but it is recognized that people with fibromyalgia tend to experience more pain when they are stressed.

Just having fibromyalgia can be stressful. Dealing with constant pain, fatigue and fibro-fog is stressful. Not being able to accomplish tasks is stressful, especially if it affects your employment situation, which in turn can lead to financial stress.

The fact that few people understand your condition and expect you to behave "normally" is stressful. Dealing with a chronic illness and the necessary lifestyle changes is stressful.

Stress reduction is an important part of managing your fibromyalgia. Here are a few ways that may help alleviate stress.

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1. Good self care. Eating a nutritious diet, getting the right amount of the right kind of exercise, establishing regular sleep habits and being kind to yourself are all part of taking good care of yourself.

2. Practice body awareness. People who deal with chronic pain can become accustomed to ignoring their bodies as a way to cope with the pain. However, if you learn to recognize your body's signals that you are becoming tense, you can use a relaxation technique or exercise early on, before stress becomes unmanageable. Take rest breaks every now and again, sit quietly and pay attention to how you feel. Learn where you feel stress first. Do you get heartburn? Do your shoulders get tight? Learn to recognize the warning signs so that you can take preventative action.

3. Change the way you think. This takes practice, but it gives you a chance to respond thoughtfully to situations instead of reacting impulsively.

4. Keep a stress journal. This has two purposes. You can write about stressful incidents and use the journal as a tool to help you identify situations that are stressful to you. This can help you either avoid repeating these situations or be better prepared should they be unavoidable. Also writing about a stressful event helps you 'debrief' and 'de-stress' after the event.

5. Learn stress management techniques, such as visualization, meditation and deep breathing. These techniques help decrease both stress and pain.

6. Physical therapy, stretching and massage can help decrease muscle tension and stress, and help minimize pain.

7. Talk to a counselor who specializes in stress management and pain treatment for chronic illnesses. He or she can help you learn new ways to manage stressful events.

Changes in Barometric Pressure

A change in the weather is a very common trigger for fibromyalgia symptoms. Fibromyalgia isn't the only condition that is affected by the weather, people with rheumatoid arthritis, multiple sclerosis and osteoarthritis also report links to the weather and the severity of their symptoms.

Barometric pressure is a measurement of the weight of the air that surrounds us. On sunny days the barometric pressure reading is normally high. However, in the lead up to a storm or a cold weather front the barometric pressure drops, at times very rapidly. It is this sudden change in pressure that often leads to flare ups of fibromyalgia symptoms.

There have been studies done to determine the link between fibromyalgia symptoms and the weather with findings that link a worsening in symptoms during cold winter months when barometric pressure is lower.

As the changes in weather are outside of your control being prepared is your only really defense against this environmental trigger. Keep an eye on the weather forecast (check the 'aches and pains' forecast at weather.com) and dress appropriately for the seasons. Layers are best as this allows you to stay warm and also strip off if you get too hot.

Try to avoid scheduling activities or work events during periods of barometric fluctuations. During the winter months ensure you get some natural light or if being outside is not an option then consider purchasing a light lamp that simulates sunlight. This can help your body regulate itself better and give you more energy.

Cold or Cold Weather

Alongside barometric pressure fluctuations feeling cold or being in a cold climate can also trigger unwanted fibromyalgia symptoms.

If you live in climate where the winters are cold or in a hot environment where air conditioning is widely used then avoiding this trigger can be difficult.

The aim here is to regulate what you can.

Winter: Think about what your day holds and dress in layers so that you can stay warm, but are able to remove layers as necessary should you start to get too hot. Try pre-warming your clothes on a radiator or with heat packs or hot water bottles so that they are warm when you put them on. When going out don't forget your coat, gloves, scarf and hat and some warm footwear too. If appropriate turn your car engine and heater on to warm up the car and make use of seat warmers if they are fitted. Alternatively a hot water bottle in the car can help.

Air Conditioning: Living in hot climate can be almost as bad as a cold one as air conditioning is extensively used and often outside of your control.

At home keep air conditioning off or down to a minimum, or at the very least redirect the air vents so the don't blow on you. When out and about wear layers that you can easily take on or off depending on whether you're inside (cold) or outside (warm). When going out to a restaurant, friends house or cinema etc check out the location of the air vents and sit as far away as possible to avoid the draft and don't put your back to them as this is often where stiffness and soreness develops.

Lack of Sleep

Researchers are divided as to whether fibromyalgia leads to sleep disturbances or that sleep disorders are a cause of fibromyalgia. However, one thing that is clear, disturbed sleep worsens the symptoms.

There are a number of sleep disorders common among Fibromyalgia sufferers including:

Alpha EEG Anomaly - when there is activity in the brain that prevents deep sleep from being achieved.

Sleep Apnea – short stoppages in breathing during sleep that can wake you and prevent deep sleep.

Restless Leg Syndrome (RLS) - sensations in the lower legs that mean the sufferer is compelled to move them to stop the sensation. This can interrupt sleep with sufferers often being forced to get out of bed during the night to move.

Periodic Limb Movement Disorder (PLMD) - similar to RLS, but it only occurs at night during deep sleep and movements can be quite violent. This leaves people feeling fatigued during the day.

Bruxism - teeth grinding and is related to Temporomandibular Joint Disorder (TMJD). This leaves the sufferer with painful jaws and can wear down the enamel on the teeth.

When suffering from insomnia or ‘non-refreshing sleep’ symptoms of pain and fatigue can be amplified. Here are some tips for getting a better night sleep:

- Go to bed at the same time every night and get up at the same time each morning, even at the weekends. By doing this you will start to regulate your body’s sleeping cycle and get it used to when to be asleep and when to be awake.
- By all means rest during the day, but if you are struggling to sleep at night try to avoid naps during the day. (If you’re sleeping fine at night then don’t worry about having short naps during the day).
- Do some exercise to encourage a good nights sleep, however avoid exercise too close to bedtime as this can interrupt your sleep patterns. Finish exercising no later than 3 hours before bed.
- Don’t have food or drinks that contain stimulants like alcohol or chocolate and give up smoking if you can. All of these can impact on your sleep and are also known triggers that can cause symptoms to flare.

- Establish a bedtime routine that winds you down ready for sleep. This could involve taking a warm bath, listening to relaxing music or reading quietly. Avoid television, if you can, for an hour before bed as this can stimulate your brain and keep you awake.
- Keep your bedroom at a comfortable temperature but try to keep a window open for ventilation.
- Invest in a good quality mattress that has sufficient 'give' but is supportive, or at least make sure that the mattress you use has not lost its supportive properties.

Damp Air / Wet Weather

Damp or wet weather can also adversely affect Fibromyalgia sufferers. Damp weather i.e. rain, snow, sleet, hail is normally accompanied by a drop in barometric pressure which is why it's common for symptoms to flare.

High levels of humidity, especially during the summer can also negatively affect sufferers. Traditionally warm dry air was recommended to reduce the severity of aches and pains.

However the real key to avoiding weather related flare-ups is to iron out the dramatic changes. Your body gets used to the environment in which you live and any changes to this can cause symptoms to get worse.

It is thought that pain increases as air pressure drops due to the body tissues expanding minutely as they are under less pressure. This can cause tendons, ligaments, muscles and bones to realign having a knock on effect to nerve endings that then fire pain signals.

So, if you live in a cold, damp environment all the time your body will become used that and the weather is likely to become less of a trigger for you. However, if you normally live in a dry climate which experiences frequent fluctuations in weather or where there are distinct seasons it is believed you are more likely to be susceptible to this trigger.

Take a look at the recommendations above for tips on dealing with changes in barometric pressure and the cold.

Sensitivity to Smells

A heightened sense of smell can be one of the more frustrating symptoms of fibromyalgia and tends to appear in conjunction with a flare up. It can make

everyday activities like a trip to the store or riding in an elevator with someone wearing cologne a nightmare giving you olfactory overload!

In a recent study¹ that examined the link between pain symptoms, stress and smells, a link was determined between bad odors and the perception of pain. 194 individuals completed a structured diary twice a day for eight days, detailing their symptoms, odors, sounds and stress.

The study found that symptoms worsened at the same time as the intensity of the odor and stress levels increased.

The increased sensitivity to smell is due to an overactive sensory system that becomes 'hyperaware' of environmental stimuli.

Here are some tips to help you cope with everyday smells that can become overpowering:

- At home use scent free washing powders, toiletries and make-up.
- Keep your house clean, especially the bathrooms and kitchen to keep smells to a minimum.
- Get into the habit of taking your rubbish out daily so that it doesn't accumulate.
- Ask family members not to wear perfumes or aftershave (or to apply it once they've left the house)
- The same goes for friends – ask them politely to refrain from using strong scents on the days you know you're going to see them and to remove flowers from their house if you're visiting.
- At work speak to your boss and ask them to request people not wear strong scents or eat at their desks etc.

Chemicals

Linked with sensitivity to smell is chemical sensitivity or multiple chemical sensitivity syndrome (MCSS). MCSS is common in fibromyalgia sufferers and causes extreme sensitivity to various chemicals and odors.

Not only can MCSS make symptoms worse but it can also impact greatly on your life.

Generally MCSS starts off with a reaction to one or two items but this tends to expand overtime to include perfumes, pesticides, fuels, smoke, household cleaning fluids, food additives, carpets, paints and other chemicals.

¹ University of Nottingham (2007, September 17). Bad Smells Linked To Fatigue And Other Complaints. *ScienceDaily*. Retrieved April 21, 2008, from <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2007/09/070913132942.htm>

There are two types of MCSS, the first is a reaction to being exposed to a large number of chemicals i.e. through your job. The second is called MCSS with Non-Identifiable Exposure, which is the most common type for Fibromyalgia sufferers where there has been no long-term exposure to chemicals.

The symptoms of MCSS are as follows:

- Cold or allergy-like symptoms – running nose, itchy eyes, sore throat etc
- Skin irritation
- Nausea / vomiting
- IBS / diarrhea
- Abdominal pains
- Sore muscles and joints
- Earache
- Fatigue and sleep disturbances
- Scalp pain
- Breathing difficulties or shortness of breath
- Migraines / headaches
- Lack of concentration

The best line of defense is to avoid any strong smelling item wherever possible. Make use of natural fibers and fabrics where possible. Employing relaxation techniques and deep breathing exercises can also help.

Over Doing It

One of the big problems for Fibromyalgia sufferers is simply ‘overdoing it’. This trigger is a concern even when a Fibromyalgia sufferer is having a good day. As having a good day with lot of energy can lull you into a false sense of security ensuring that you do too much and then pay for it with a number of days of fatigue and increased pain.

One way to tackle the problem of ‘overdoing it’ is to schedule your days carefully and only include tasks that are really important for that day. Start practicing saying ‘no’ to requests for your time or energy. If there is an event or activity coming up which you really want to attend, take care to scale back activities in the run up so that your energy reserves are high.

On your good days it’s important to pace yourself and ensure you get some rest. This is probably the hardest ‘skill’ you will have to learn with Fibromyalgia but it can make the world of difference when you do.

Menstrual Cycle / PMS

For many women the lead up to and the first half of their period can see an increase in symptoms.

Although it is not clear why symptoms should worsen during a menstrual cycle, it is believed hormones play a key role.

To help ease menstrual pains try the following:

- Heat pads
- Rest
- Stretching exercises
- Gentle, low impact exercise
- Painkillers if necessary

Keep a diary of your menstrual cycle so you know when to expect it and schedule activities to avoid times when you believe you'll experience a flare in symptoms.

Bright Lights / Sunshine

Another aspect of the extreme sensitivity that is common with Fibromyalgia patients is an over sensitivity to bright lights and /or sunshine.

Exposure to bright light can bring on headaches/migraines and increased muscle aches and pains.

To reduce the impact light has on your symptoms remove fluorescent lights from your home and replace with softer light. Speak to your employer and request that any fluorescent lights near your desk are changed. Alternatively have a desk lamp and turn off the overhead lights if possible. If all else fails you can consider wearing tinted glasses if the lights can't be changed or turned off (i.e. you work in an open plan environment).

Finally always ensure that you have a good quality pair of polarized sunglasses to hand and use them whenever you feel the sun is too bright. Don't be embarrassed about wearing them on overcast days either – channel your inner celebrity!

Strenuous Exercise

While exercise is extremely beneficial to Fibromyalgia sufferers, doing too much too soon can make symptoms worse usually bringing on bouts of fatigue and muscle pain.

The problem lies in knowing when to stop. What you may have easily been able to do in the past is not necessarily an option for you now. Physical exercise can leave you feeling drained and hurting.

The key is finding a balance between keeping moving and not taking it too far.

Studies² have found that regular exercise, coupled with a healthy balanced diet, has positive impacts on reducing Fibromyalgia symptoms.

Exercise releases endorphins, the body's natural pain killers, relieves stress, helps to keep weight under control, strengthens muscles and also helps towards a healthy cardiovascular system.

Plus there are the added benefits of increased energy and improved sleep patterns.

Don't let the thought of exercise put you off. It can be very hard to become motivated when you're hurting and even getting out of bed is huge effort. However the benefits are worth it.

If you're just starting out with exercise after a period of inactivity it's a good idea to speak to your doctor to go through an appropriate exercise plan. Try walking for 15-30 minutes every other day to get you started. Make sure you have suitable shoes and try to rope a friend or partner into going with you to keep you motivated.

If you can't manage 15-30 minutes then don't give up, just focus on going a little further each time out.

Walking is a great exercise for Fibromyalgia sufferers to get started with – no special equipment is needed, there are no fees to pay and there are no scheduled classes to keep. However, setting aside certain times to go can help you to stick with it more easily.

Remember that before you start out doing some gentle stretching will help loosen muscles and help to avoid any muscle strains or injuries. Don't forget to stretch at the end of your session too. If you feel the need, stretching during exercise can help ease sore muscles and keep you on track.

² Prescribed exercise in people with fibromyalgia: parallel group randomised controlled trial *BMJ* 2002;325:185 (27 July) <http://www.bmj.com/cgi/content/full/325/7357/185#References>

JAMA and Archives Journals (2007, November 13). Exercise And Education Helps Women With Fibromyalgia. *ScienceDaily*. Retrieved April 22, 2008, from <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2007/11/071112163625.htm>

Warming up is also important. All this means is performing your chosen exercise at a slower pace. So if you're out walking start slowly and speed up after about 5 minutes. The same applies for other exercises like swimming, cycling etc.

If you're having a bad day and really don't feel like exercising have a go anyway, often you'll feel better and you can always reduce the time or distance if you are not feeling up to the full amount.

It pays to be realistic and understand that progress is unlikely to be continual and you may have some setbacks. The important point is to not give up or become discouraged but to stick with it.

Getting Too Hot

It is not uncommon for Fibromyalgia sufferers to experience fluctuations in their ability to regulate body temperature and therefore extremes in temperatures can lead to an increase in symptoms.

While it is more commonly the cold that effects Fibromyalgia sufferers, for some getting too hot can bring on a flare up of symptoms.

Try the following suggestions to avoid overheating:

- Dress in layers, both on warm days and cold. This will allow you to regulate your body temperature by shedding or adding clothes. During the summer opt for cotton clothes or other natural fibers and go for light colors that reflect the heat.
- In the summer avoid the sun over the hottest part of the day (usually 11.00am to 3pm), wear cool clothes and a wide sun hat. Carry a spritzer bottle filled with water and use as needed. Spraying your face and underside of your wrists can cool you down. At home keep your rooms cool by shutting the curtains.
- During exercise dress appropriately and ensure you have plenty of water to hand. Try to pace your exercise so that your heart rate is raised but you're not sweating copiously.
- Drink plenty of fluids.
- Check the weather forecasts as humidity and pollution levels along with increased temperatures can both be contributory factors.
- If you have got too hot, seek shade and place a cold compress on your head and underside of your wrists to try and lower body temperature.

Underactivity

With a chronic pain condition like Fibromyalgia it can be very easy to fall into the trap of not doing anything. However, underactivity can be just as bad as over exertion.

Staying active and adding simple exercises into your daily routine can help strengthen your muscles, prevent injuries, and decrease pain symptoms. Keeping busy also has the added benefit of taking your mind off your condition and therefore there is less time to focus on the pain and discomfort.

While it is not advisable to over do it, keeping moving is key to reducing pain and other Fibromyalgia symptoms. Learn to pace your self and listen to your body, rest when you feel you should but don't use Fibromyalgia as an excuse to do nothing.

Take a look at the exercise recommendations above (under the strenuous exercise section) for ways to sensibly introduce an exercise regime into your life.

To keep your mind busy take up a hobby or get involved with an activity that doesn't tax you physically but which is enjoyable and gets you involved with others.

Good examples are joining a book club, craft hobbies like scrapbooking or knitting and art.

Sitting on Hard Chairs

Sitting on hard surfaces, or just sitting still for any length of time can lead to an increase in muscle aches and pains.

When at home it can be frustrating finding a comfortable position but this situation is magnified when out and in situations that are out of your control i.e. in a meeting, at a theatre, travelling etc.

Here are some tips for making sitting more comfortable:

1. Adopt good posture – keep your back upright and your feet flat on the floor, use a footrest or portable backrest if necessary.
2. Foam cushions can make sitting down for long periods more comfortable and they are fairly slim line so are easily transportable.
3. During break times if it's appropriate find a quiet area to lie down and stretch out your back and neck muscles – at work empty meeting rooms are perfect for this.
4. Try taking heat pads with you if there is somewhere to plug them in. If not a hot water bottle is a great alternative or if all else fails take travel heat pads

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that heat up when activated. These don't last as long but are reusable and fairly discreet.

Although this report details the most commonly experienced symptoms there may be others that are personal triggers for you.

The best way of identifying your own triggers is by keeping a symptom journal noting down how you're feeling along with what you did and what you ate during the day.

Over time you may notice patterns in your symptoms in relation to certain activities or foods. Use your journal to formulate your own trigger list and work towards eliminating or minimizing these factors from your life.