



# How Keeping a Fibromyalgia Journal Can Help You Feel Better

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## Journaling for Fibromyalgia Patients

If you have fibromyalgia, you probably spend a large portion of your time wondering what it was that you recently did or ate that caused this latest bout of pain or extreme fatigue. New symptoms present themselves, too, and one has to wonder what the heck causes something else to start hurting so severely? This is where journaling for fibromyalgia helps: it can help you keep track of your lifestyle and various symptoms.

It may seem like you are playing a guessing game, and avoiding flares or new symptoms can seem impossible. But, there is a better way to outsmart your fibromyalgia and take some control back.

## The Benefits of Journaling

Last year I began keeping a journal of what I did and what I consumed each day. It was not anything big or fancy, but I took the time to include how I felt (pain and fatigue levels), and any other clues that would help me put the puzzle pieces together.

You've probably heard that what you put into your body can be a deciding factor in how you feel each day and during the days that follow. What we fuel our bodies with can either support our health and actually limit the level of pain and discomfort we experience, or it can fan the flames of fibromyalgia into a full-blown attack.

I have tested this theory (okay, I really was just eating what I wanted because I wanted it), and I found it to be true. What I ate affected my fibro symptoms more than I wanted to admit.

So, I have seen the results of my own roller coaster of eating habits, including my slips where I plummeted into an indulging cycle of foods I shouldn't have been eating, which produced debilitating pain and suffering.

The good news in all of this is I have had periods of time where I committed to eating only healthy foods and avoided trigger foods. I got rest and soft exercise (no lifting weights for me!), and the results were less pain and more energy.

## Take Back Control

In a disease where one can feel like life is completely out of their control and pain is inevitable, it is great to know you hold a little bit of control through your diet and lifestyle.

Recently, I have been in such pain that it felt like everything was hurting me. I don't want to move because of the pain, but not moving can cause me more pain. It is a vicious cycle.

And it is not like not moving feels much better. Laying down hurts — even my pillow doesn't feel like the right height or firmness — and by morning I have such severe neck and upper back pain that I am awake at dawn.

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So, I took a hard look at my fibromyalgia journal and saw that I probably have contributed to this painful period of time. I wasn't eating well, I worked long hours, and I kept pushing myself even when my body warned me that it was about to turn on me. My journal tells the whole story.

## Starting a Fibro Journal

I am not sure what my excuse is for eating poorly some days, or even in small ways that trigger more fibromyalgia pain. But by keeping a journal it helps me see where triggers hide.

I can recognize patterns (eating bacon with nitrates or drinking a diet soda equates to pain for three days), and I can identify the foods that should be avoided. I also can see where certain activities cause a reaction in my body. A journal gives you the power to prevent more pain.

Dietary triggers are sometimes unique to the fibromyalgia patient. You need to know what causes *you* more pain and fatigue with your fibromyalgia. To do this you should:

- **Buy a journal and keep it where you will see and use it daily.** Knowledge is power, and since everybody is different, you need to know what you personally should avoid eating. We also tend to forget all the bad stuff we are eating until we see it in writing. Once you know you have to write it down (it makes you accountable), you may find that you think twice about your choices.

*Next page: what to avoid while journaling for fibromyalgia.*

## Starting a Fibromyalgia Journal

- **Record everything.** Do this even if you think it has nothing to do with your fibromyalgia. You are looking for patterns; eating something and then seeing your pain worsen on several occasions. You may discover a trigger food is something you were certain was safe.
- **Write down how you feel each day too.** You should also note exactly how you are feeling each day in terms of your fibromyalgia. This will allow you to look back and see certain patterns emerging, where certain foods trigger more pain or, on the flip side, days of improvement in how you feel.

Doctors say that although extensive studies have not been conducted, they often see a commonality in fibromyalgia trigger foods after discussions they have with their patients. I personally need to avoid consuming things like soda, processed foods, nitrates, and too much dairy or gluten. All of these things have a profound effect on my pain and stiffness.

## Knowing What to Avoid

When you start journaling for fibromyalgia, the first few days are typically the hardest. This is because you need to remember to write everything down, and get into a writing routine.

Writing everything down may seem like a nuisance. Plus, you won't see immediate results to your health after you avoid your trigger foods. Improvements in your diet will take a while to have a cumulative effect on your pain and fatigue.

Sometimes you may see a possible pattern emerge, but you are not certain it is really a pattern of a trigger food. Say you love cheese and you suspect it may actually be fueling your fibromyalgia pain. You eat it often and you are in pain often. How do you know for sure?

The best way is to eliminate it from your diet for 10 days and see if you experience improvement. If you do, you can probably be sure it has contributed to your fibromyalgia health challenges.

You can also try testing foods by reintroducing them back into your diet and seeing how you feel in the days that

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follow.

Sometimes you learn that you can indulge in trigger foods as an occasional treat, but cannot consume them in large quantities or for several days in a row. A journal helps you learn exactly what you can eat and what quantities are safe for your fibromyalgia.

### **What Else Can You Do?**

It helps to look more closely at common trigger foods. As I said, not everyone is affected the same way by certain foods, but many people with fibromyalgia find that pain can be fueled by eating things like:

- **Nitrates:** This is a preservative found in hot dogs, sandwich meats, bacon, and even in wine. There are certain natural/organic brands you can buy, which do not contain nitrates.
- **Sugar or high fructose corn syrup:** Sugar in some people can really fuel a flare, so try and limit your intake. This also includes anything high in carbs, which of course turn to sugar in the body.
- **Limit dairy:** I have never cut out dairy completely, but I limit my consumption and it does seem to help.
- **Limit gluten:** Many people with fibromyalgia say going gluten-free has made a huge difference in their pain management, but it takes a big commitment. I try and limit my consumption, but have not been able to stick with a gluten-free diet for very long.
- **Cut out preservatives, artificial sweeteners, artificial flavorings, and food coloring:** Natural is best. Avoid foods that can stay fresh for several weeks, contain dyes, and have ingredients in them that you cannot easily pronounce. Artificial sweeteners are the worst for fibromyalgia patients and really should be avoided completely.

Keeping a journal may seem like just one more thing to do on days where you don't feel like doing anything. But, it can really give you insight into what foods or activities can trigger more fibromyalgia pain, fatigue and general discomfort, and give you the power to ease your pain.