

## **To Do or Not To Do: List Making Strategy for Chronic Fatigue Syndrome Patients**

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Dear Friends,

Today I finished getting my tax information ready for my accountant. I really need to be more organized about this. I need to learn to use the money management programs on my computer. But with brain fog, learning new things can be very difficult.

All of us know it is necessary to be somewhat organized to get through life. The changes in our mental function make necessary special types of organization, things like always putting your car keys or glasses in the same place. We have to make certain that we write appointments and other important things in a central place where we can't miss them. I can't tell you how many appointments I missed until I got that area of my life squared away. I just couldn't accept that my previously excellent memory was "fogged in".

To do lists are a necessary part of our life. Still, we can't let them govern us. Recently, I heard a "life coach" on one of the talk shows. Many of her suggestions made sense. She talked about how she had been able to organize her busy life. However, one of the ways she managed to cope intrigued me. She said she made herself a NOT TO DO list.

In the book I am currently reading, *Fibromyalgia & Chronic Myofascial Pain*, by Devin Starlanyl and Mary Ellen Copeland, the authors list "Activities to Avoid: staying in the same position for long periods, traveling extensively without a break, performing repetitive movements, exercising too much, immersing yourself in water less than 88 degrees Fahrenheit, becoming overtired, going without food, wearing high-heeled shoes, wearing tight clothing, doing heavy work, exposing yourself to electromagnetic fields for extended periods of time, smoking nicotine, or ingesting alcohol, salty food, junk food or caffeine, spending time with people who make you feel badly."

I think all of these belong on the not to do list, but the feeling I got from the "life coach" went even further. She implied that the things on her list were things she previously felt she "should" do. By putting them on her list, she was giving herself permission to eliminate these things without feeling ambivalent or guilty. She included several of the things listed above, as well as things like ironing, re-doing chores her children or husband had done, etc.

I have made a "not to do" list for myself. Many of the things included are those which have already been mentioned, but there are others. For instance, I have never been very comfortable in pantyhose, so I rarely wear dresses. If I do, they are long so I don't have to wear hose. Fortunately, where I live, the difference between everyday and semiformal is whether you wear your regular jeans, or your new ones. So casual and comfortable is the norm. But I would dress that way in any case. Even for special occasions, there are pant outfits that are appropriate yet comfortable.

Another thing on my list is not volunteering or being manipulated into commitments that I know will be a strain on my energy and pain level. If you are not "retired" yet, you will learn how many friends and family will forget that you are not working for medical reasons and find things for you to do for them. It is a must that we learn how to say NO.

A very important thing on my “not to do” list concerns putting the needs of others before the things I need to preserve my best functional level. Of course, there are situations such as family illness, and small children where this may not be possible. However, we must learn to rank our health at or near the top of our list of priorities.

Negative “self-talk” is another thing on my list. When I pay attention, I notice that the more tired and frustrated I become, the more negative names I am calling myself; such as stupid, dummy, klutz, etc. All of these names decrease my self esteem when I know that mistakes I make or things that I do slowly or incorrectly are more likely attributed to brain fog and the memory lapses that go with the disease. My spouse frequently reminds me that calling myself these names is not good for my mental health.

Putting myself in the situation where I have to hurry is another no-no for me. Hurrying, such as to get ready for an appointment, really adds to my fatigue level. I guess it must be the extra adrenaline that pumps into my system when I rush that makes me feel so exhausted and stressed. Getting up a half hour earlier, or planning plenty of preparation time is worth the effort to be able to get ready at my speed. Some days I need rest breaks, other days I am able to get through the process without stopping. If I’m ready a few minutes early, I have a bit more driving time.

Even the chores around the house are done when I feel like doing them. I don’t “freak out” if the laundry goes unfolded for several days. The floor gets vacuumed when it needs it. If all of the days dishes don’t get washed until evening, I’m OK with that. I’m convinced that a layer of dust protects my furniture. My house is nowhere near filthy, but its not spotless either. It’s lived in!

I think some of my friends worry that I have become a homebody. I usually only go out when I need to, and really don’t visit much with friends or family except via the computer. So many people don’t, and don’t want to understand how we are feeling. I get tired of always saying I’m fine, but I don’t want to become a constant complainer either.

If I were living alone, I would make more of an effort to be out with friends. But I am fortunate that my spouse is also my best friend. We enjoy doing the same things. We are both “night people”, so our sleep time is the same. When I include our two wonderful feline companions, I have all the company I need. At home, I also have all those things I need to help provide my physical comfort.

Do you have a NOT TO LIST? If not, perhaps you should start one. It is yet another step toward health, both mental and physical. Take care and be well.

Yours in Health,

Eunice

### **The Fibromyalgia Diet: Eating for a Better Quality of Life**

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By Colleen Black-Brown

There has been little information available from the scientific community on nutrition and diet for fibros. Research has not yet proven that any specific foods affect fibromyalgia (FM), positively or negatively. But we do know that eating a good balanced diet helps everyone’s body function at its best. Good nutrition can help in your health and healing. Eating healthful foods including those

low in fat and high in immunity boosting antioxidants and phytochemicals may work together to help maximize energy and alertness and minimize constant fatigue and lethargy.

Many people have overcome their FM symptoms by changing their lifestyle and diet. Mary Moeller, author and spokeswoman on FM, now enjoys a state of remission from her FM symptoms by making a few changes in her lifestyle. To reach this ideal she advocates eliminating 4 foods completely from your diet (Mary Moeller's Fibromyalgia Cookbook.)

1. Chocolate
2. Carbonated beverages
3. Coffee
4. Alcohol

Along with changes in nutrition she encourages stretching, exercising and drinking 8+ glasses of water a day. Also, in Mary Moeller and Joe Elrod's book, The Fibromyalgia Nutrition Guide, they advocate a more complete list in order to overcome fatigue and feel your best. The 12 items to avoid are:

1. High fat dairy foods
2. White sugar and white flour
3. Fried foods
4. Preservatives, junk food, and salt
5. Red meat (especially salt cured, cured bacon, smoked, or nitrate cured)
6. Coffee and caffeinated teas
7. Colas, soda pop, and carbonated beverages
8. Liquid with your meals
9. Alcoholic beverages
10. All forms of tobacco
11. Prolonged periods of direct sun exposure
12. Nutrasweet and saccharine

Along with Mary Moeller and others, I also have enjoyed the benefits of better health after quitting carbonated beverages and coffee. Before, I would have my diet coke and coffee in order to get me out of bed in the morning. As a result I was very hyper and then about 2 hours later or so I would crash and be very tired and fatigued. So I would pump more caffeine and diet coke down to get me moving again. As a result I would spike, crash, spike, crash.

My energy level was on a continual roller coaster ride of highs and lows. Since quitting I have been enjoying a nice steady stream of constant energy all day long. When I first heard of eliminating sodas I was mortified. I thought I was doing extremely well to only allow myself 1-2 cokes a day, and to give them up, why I thought, "never"! But little by little I finally weaned myself off, and boy am I glad I did. I have so much more energy.

Some unsubstantiated studies claim that carbonated beverages leak phosphorus from your bones, and the aspartame (NutraSweet) in sodas cause memory loss. Others have claimed the sugar in carbonated beverages (some as many as 12-14 teaspoons) may contribute to yeast problems.

Caffeine in soda and other beverages is a diuretic, which means you need to drink additional water to replace the lost water. Scientists at Washington State University found that caffeine makes people lose calcium in their urine faster than they usually do. Caffeine can also put added stress on the adrenal glands and the liver. Since most FM sufferers may have adrenal malfunction due to chronic stress and inadequate nutrition it is probably wise to avoid the caffeine and carbonated drinks.

I know that at times I eat more food or sugar as a way of dealing with stress or handling challenging problems that arise. When I do this it puts added stress on my adrenal glands. Adrenalin released from the adrenal gland penalizes the body and can cause acute symptoms. By burning too much sugar your body may deplete its vitamins and minerals especially the B vitamins. Adrenalin has even been known to be responsible for some panic attacks.

If you subject your body to highly refined, over-processed foods, sugar, caffeine, pork, junk food, highly processed starches, additives and preservatives, and highly acid foods, it is possible that your body will suffer because of an already compromised immune system that may be found in many FM sufferers.

Most processed foods are often adulterated by heating, and are full of additives, preservatives, colorings, salt and sugar. Fried foods and salt have been found to aggravate pain or swelling in some fibros. By the way, most drinks purchased at a store have been processed including soda, bottled juices, coffee, alcohol and others. Since many fibros are sensitive to food, drugs, chemicals and pollutants in the environment anyway it is important we do not subject our bodies to more than what's necessary.

Even many non-processed foods or "natural" foods can be hazardous to the health of fibros. Many fibros are chocoholics. Chocolate is high in fat and caffeine. According to Mark Pellegrino in his book, *Fibro Survivor*, reducing fatty intake could increase energy. Don't be fooled when buying dietary chocolate, which has no added sugar. Although they may have replaced the sugar with manitol or nutrasweet the fat caloric content still remains high. Therefore a low fat diet is recommended. This means chocolate should not be ingested or should be eaten in moderation.

Certain foods have been found to cause fatigue. Doctors concluded in *Annals of Rheumatic Disease* that in certain individuals some foods aggravate arthritis. Often, foods that are acidic are the culprit. Therefore an arthritic diet is one that remains alkaline. Some fibros find that highly acidic foods such as citric, foods in the nightshade family like tomato, potato, eggplant, and peppers, red meat, cow milk products, brown and white wheat flour products, sugar containing foods, coffee, chocolate all seem to trigger more muscle pain.

Different foods affect each individual fibro differently. For instance some fibros have severe food allergies for dairy, wheat, corn, nightshade family plants, etc. whereas others do not. You can discover your own food sensitivity by eliminating foods that trigger pain. Keeping a food diary can help. In your diary write down everything that goes into your mouth and at the same time track

your FM pain. By comparing the two you may discover that certain foods may trigger allergies or pain. It has been found that food allergies may undermine your nutrient uptake.

In a 1992 study as reported in the book, *What your doctor may not tell you about Fibromyalgia*, by Paul St. Amand M.D. and Claudia Marek, it states that:

60% of fibro patients of normal weight crave carbohydrates, and 75% of obese fibros crave carbohydrates. However, cravings for carbohydrates are not limited to FM sufferers and therefore, can't be considered a unique characteristic of individuals suffering from FM.

Some fibros have a low carbohydrate intolerance or reactive hypoglycemia (low blood sugar) that occurs after eating carbohydrates. This can cause problems metabolizing carbohydrates, inability to lose weight, fatigue, carbohydrate craving and worsening symptoms. Carbohydrates stimulate insulin production. Excess insulin can cause an increased uptake of sugar into muscle and liver, which can be stored as fatty acids in fat cells, and prevent carbs from being used.

There are nutritional strategies to help fibros. Dr. Mark Pellegrino says that because of the biochemical changes in fibros it makes good medical sense to try a low carb, high protein diet. Protein diets can decrease cravings, increase energy, lose weight and help with hypoglycemia. Pellegrino suggests watching carb's like bread, potatoes and refined sugars. There are many fad protein diets like Sugar busters, Zone, Adkins and other low carb diets. However, Pellegrino says that some fibros do not tolerate a protein diet as well as others, so experiment and find what dietary plan works for you.

Dr. August believes that a 30/30/40 ratio of carbohydrate, fat and protein enables fibros to reach their optimum weight with maximum health. Hypoglycemia and low carb intolerance can be controlled by diet. Dr. August advocates the Zone diet (Sears and Lawren 1995).

However, there is strong evidence that the Zone diet "works" mainly because of the reduction in total caloric intake with little or nothing to do with the release of insulin. The reader is referred to some excellent websites that present pro and con arguments over the Zone and other low carb/high protein/high fat diets:

[watchingweight.com/lowcarb.htm](http://watchingweight.com/lowcarb.htm)

[cyberiron.com/nutrition/notzone.html](http://cyberiron.com/nutrition/notzone.html)

[getzoned.com.au/In\\_the\\_Media\\_text\\_only.htm](http://getzoned.com.au/In_the_Media_text_only.htm)

[nutrition.ucdavis.edu/perspectives/SeptOct99.htm](http://nutrition.ucdavis.edu/perspectives/SeptOct99.htm)

Your cells must receive nourishment and eliminate wastes. When you start to eat healthful foods you may find that you crave sugar, fat, starch and processed foods. This is a normal occurrence due to a physiological change in your body's chemistry. During the transition time try not to indulge in sugar, fat and processed foods. These cravings will become fewer and further between as time goes on. Of course, people who do not suffer from FM also have the same cravings; therefore, we are not unique.

People with FM need to take extra care to eat well. Try to incorporate raw foods into your diet. I try to eat a piece of raw fruit or vegetable for breakfast and a raw vegetable or salad for lunch. Raw foods contain enzymes that can assist in the digestion of foods. Raw foods are full of antioxidants and phytochemicals that help boost the immune system.

If have a juicer, fresh carrot juice is a wonderful addition to incorporate into your lifestyle. Many people have claimed to heal cancer along with an array of diseases by eating raw foods and drinking carrot juice. Of course, most of these claims are testimonials with little scientific research to back the use of raw foods to prevent chronic disease.

Along with vegetables, and fruits, omega 3 fish oil contains anti-inflammatory properties. Eating well does not mean you have to starve yourself or totally eliminate all the foods you love. Rather make small gradual changes and focus on the foods you enjoy.

Eating well may help reduce the fatigue and maximize energy. Incorporate variety, balance and moderation. Improve your health by reevaluating your overall eating habits and try making your diet more nutritious. Your body has been wonderfully and marvelously designed. Do you allow it to run as efficiently as possible?

The photochemicals present in vegetables and fruits have been shown to have a protective effect against many chronic diseases including heart disease and cancer the second most prevalent killers in the U.S. These same phytochemicals may help reduce the pain response among fibros. Although definitive solutions to the FM dilemma await research verification it is my thought that we begin to incorporate more “raw foods or slightly cooked” vegetables and fruits into our diet in order to live a quality life.

Look for healthy recipes on our website ([www.fibrofog.com](http://www.fibrofog.com)) that use the principles of good eating discussed in this article. The bonus (as testified to by my husband) is that you will be considered a “gourmet cook” as your health improves.

This information was developed and written by Colleen Black-Brown. If you wish to use this information please contact me – send an email to: [bbrown@uark.edu](mailto:bbrown@uark.edu)

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