Foods That Can Help Pain - and Why

Just as there are foods that can increase or aggravate pain, there are also foods that can decrease or ease pain. In the previous page I explained how tea, with its beneficial L-Theanine, can help by relaxing the body, and yet help keep one alert—especially green tea because it has more of this substance. And herbal teas, which naturally have no caffeine, can help according the plant used. Peppermint tea, for example can help ease stomach issues and nausea, while chamomile can relax, soothe and bring on sleep; and orange spice or English Breakfast tea can energize. And I explained that chocolate, especially dark chocolate, is loaded with antioxidants, and helps raise the serotonin levels in the body. The caveat to this is that a little goes a long way. Don’t forget chocolate also comes with a multitude of calories (the sneaky little devils). One of the most helpful types of foods that can help pain and other symptoms is antioxidants.

1) **Antioxidants.** Everyone has heard about antioxidants and knows that they are good for you. But most people don’t know exactly why. It’s because they neutralize free radicals. Free radicals are not Fibro-friendly. Free radicals literally run all throughout your body creating mayhem. They latch onto good healthy cells, and render them powerless and ineffective. They often cause the death of cells, which in turn creates aging and illness, especially of the autoimmune kind. Antioxidants not only neutralize these little nasties, but they also help reverse the damage they have created! How’s that for a healthy food source! Antioxidants are found in fruits, veggies (no wonder mom kept telling you to eat them), whole grains, nuts and legumes (beans). But each antioxidant is work specific and so works in a different part of your body. So instead of eating a lot of one fruit or veggie or nut, it’s best to eat a wide variety of these healthy foods—a bit of each as it were—to cover all your bases.

2) **Omega 3 EPA-DHA.** These essential fatty acids are found in dark meat fish, algae or seaweed for the most part. But they can also be found in wild game like turkey, venison, etc and in “free range” meats, chicken and eggs. “Free range” means that they have been raised off the land and not feed grain or corn at any time. These animals create their own EPA-DHA and pass it along to us, naturally. Unfortunately these free range meats are rarely found in your local grocery store and it may take some searching and calling around to find them. However, you can find salmon, tuna, mackerel, sardines, halibut and even seaweed in your local grocery. Omega 3 EPA and DHA are natural anti-inflammatories and are essential fatty acids. This means they are essential to your body. In fact, DHA makes up a huge bulk of your brain matter! These fatty acids serve as the outer coating, or membrane, of each of your cells and facilitate the
movement of nutrients in and waste out of each cell. Essential? You bet! But when we don’t have enough Omega 3 EPA-DHA (fish oil), your body will use saturated fat for the membrane around each cell, which is tougher and rubbery, making each cell work harder and harder to get the nutrients in and often can’t get the waste out. This can damages cells. And definitely makes them less efficient in their work and tired from all the extra work. Tired cells age faster, making YOU age faster. And you are often weaker, and more subject to illnesses. THIS is why EPA and DHA are essential.

3) Omega 9. This is not an essential fatty acid, but it is a fatty acid nonetheless, and it is a very healthy fat. It is a monounsaturated fat. Foods containing this Omega 9 are Olive oil, peanut butter, almond butter, raw nuts like hazelnuts, macadamia nuts, cashews, pistachios and pecans, dry roasted nuts, ripe olives, unprocessed and unheated (unhydrogenated) sunflower oil, safflower oil, linoleic oil. Here again, a little goes a long way—8 to 12 nuts provide all the fats you need without going over the calorie barrier. Monounsaturated fats have been shown to reduce bad (LDL) cholesterol, help the heart in many ways, help the colon, and the brain. And they may help you live longer according to studies of the Mediterranean diet, which uses generous amounts of olive oil and other monounsaturated fats. Healthy fats help our cause too. They help inflammation and pain.

4) Tart Cherries. Tart cherries, also called montmorency cherries, have been shown to help arthritis pain, muscle pain, back pain and neurodegenerative pain in many people. Aside from fact that they are great antioxidants, they have a substance called phenolics, which are anti-inflammatories. These cherries, and their juice, have been used for gout for centuries because they reduce uric acid and toxins, and reduce inflammation. All cherries have these phenolics, specifically anthocyanins which are a COX-1 and COX-2 inhibitors, but generally speaking the darker and tarter the cherry, the more of this substance they have. And the darker and more tart the cherry, the less sugar it has too.

5) Vitamin D. Vitamin D is obviously not a food. In fact it’s not even a vitamin; it’s a hormone. But it is also one of those essentials for our body, and it can definitely help pain. Recent research has found that insufficient levels of this essential “vitamin” are extremely common, especially in those with Fibromyalgia. And this insufficiency is linked to osteoporosis, breast cancer, heart disease, autoimmune diseases, depression, high blood pressure and much more. Ask your doctor to test your level of Vitamin D. It’s something he may not think about, so remind him. Some foods with Vitamin D are wild salmon, herring, sardines, mackerel, egg yolks and mushrooms. Some Vitamin D can be made by your body when in sunlight if you are healthy, under age 40, have light-colored skin and live way south of the Mason-Dixon line, but these foods and/or a vitamin D supplement may be required to maintain normal levels of this essential hormone for most people, especially in the winter. According to John Jacob Cannell, MD, Director of The Vitamin D Council, http://www.vitamindcouncil.org/treatment.shtml, Vitamin D3 is the most beneficial form and doses recommended now are 1000 to 5000 IU per day.

6) B-Vitamins. Again, not exactly food. But foods contain B-Vitamins, specifically oats and whole grains, nuts, avocados, potatoes, legumes (beans), bananas, turkey, liver and tuna, to name a few. B-vitamins are crucial for pain and for energy. They are also highly necessary to the immune system, brain function and much more.
B12 is also essential, especially for energy production, and can be harder to acquire for vegetarians because it is not found in plants. B12 is found in most meats, shrimp, chicken and dairy products like eggs and milk. Health food stores carry B12 as a supplement, but be aware that it is not very absorbable as a capsule or within a multi-vitamin. The most absorbable forms are liquid drops or sublingual tablets. These tablets dissolve under the tongue and go directly into the bloodstream, bypassing the digestive tract where it would be dissolved by stomach acids. Ask your doctor to check your B12 levels. If you are low as is common in those with Fibromyalgia, he may prescribe injections for a period of time to bring levels back up to normal. But be aware also, that our bodies use up this vitamin (and indeed all vitamins) daily, and we need to constantly replenish it daily through diet.

7) Ginger, Turmeric (Curcumin), and Cinnamon. These are spices. Ginger and Curcumin have been found to help pain for many people. Freshly ground ginger, from the rhizome now available in most grocery stores, has been used as an anti-inflammatory and for helping muscle and joint pain, as well as headaches. But it’s also used to help nausea and diarrhea.
Curcumin helps inflammation. But it is also another COX-1 and COX-2 inhibitor – a pain-reliever – especially morning pain and joint stiffness.
Cinnamon has been used for centuries to relieve flatulence (gas), to improve digestion, nausea, and PMS queasiness. Recent studies have shown that half a teaspoon of cinnamon taken daily may help control and even prevent Type 2 Diabetes, and help insulin resistance, by significantly reducing blood sugar levels. Visit WebMD for more information on the new studies [http://diabetes.webmd.com/cinnamon-and-benefits-for-diabetes](http://diabetes.webmd.com/cinnamon-and-benefits-for-diabetes).
These spices are also available as supplements. All three are carminative (easing flatulence and digestion), anti-inflammatories and have a warming effect, which aids in circulation and joint pain.

8) Yogurt. Yogurt is a probiotic food that greatly helps intestinal issues, including gluten sensitivity. People with mild lactose intolerance may find yogurt quite soothing too. It’s been shown that lactase, the enzyme for digesting lactose, is created during the process of making yogurt. See Cathy Wong’s article on About.com: [http://altmedicine.about.com/od/healthconditionsdisease/a/lactose_intoler.htm](http://altmedicine.about.com/od/healthconditionsdisease/a/lactose_intoler.htm) The good bacteria in yogurt, acidophilus and bifidobacterium, help your intestines and help bring better digestion and healing overall. It is full of beneficial ingredients like protein, calcium, Vitamins B2, B12, Vitamins A and D, magnesium, potassium, and more. Visit WebMD for more info: [http://www.webmd.com/diet/features/benefits-of-yogurt](http://www.webmd.com/diet/features/benefits-of-yogurt). When intestinal issues are up close and personal, and yogurt is impractical or unavailable, there are supplements in capsule form that will do the trick. Acidophilus and or a probiotic complex may be used.

*If you personally find other foods that can help your pain, please e-mail me at patichandler@yahoo.com and let me know. I’d love to share this information with others. If a certain food helps YOU, chances are it may help others also.*

*Thanks. We all have to look out for each other, right?*