

NUTRITION & CHRONIC PAIN



Everyone knows how important healthy eating habits are and we also know that good nutrition advice is easy to find.

In fact, the messages are so clear and insistent that it's hard *not* to hear them!

And yet, the food on our plates is often far from what health experts recommend. This is particularly true for people who suffer from chronic pain, since they frequently lack the energy to prepare a healthy, balanced meal. Sometimes, they aren't even hungry. As a result, they get caught up in a hard-to-break cycle,

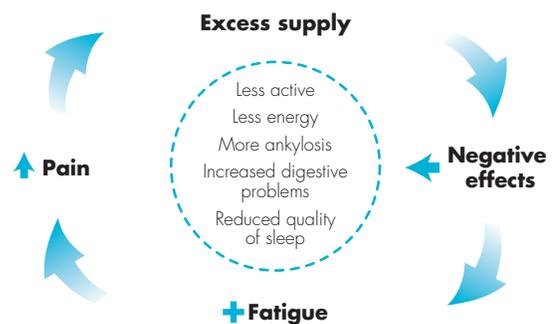
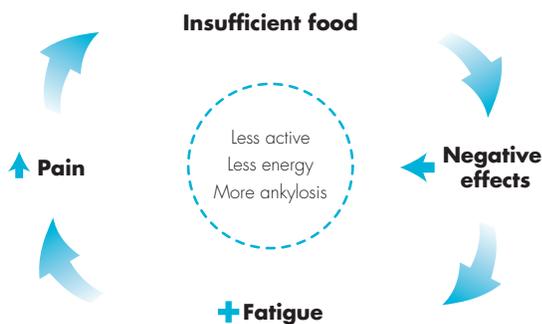
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for poor nutrition can make it harder for them to combat their pain.

Tell me what you eat and I'll tell you how you are!

Food gives us the energy we need to do things and carry out everyday tasks. It is the fuel that keeps our engines running. Not uncommonly, people who suffer from chronic pain are physically exhausted, and poor nutrition can be as much to blame as the pain itself. Also, eating badly or not enough can have significant consequences, leading to a loss of energy, fatigue, stiffness, a reduction in activity, and feelings of discouragement. Any of these can increase the severity of pain.

As for excess weight, it can cause pain in the back, hips, knees, ankles and feet. People who are overweight are also more vulnerable to more serious health problems, such as cardiovascular disease.



Solutions to some nutrition-related issues frequently experienced by people who live with chronic pain:

- *“I suffer from constipation or diarrhea caused by my medication.”* Eat foods that help elimination and make sure you maintain the balance of your intestinal flora by eating foods containing probiotics, such as yogurt or other similar products.
- *“I don’t have the strength to stay upright long enough to prepare a meal.”* Find a comfortable position (seated or standing) and plan meals around foods that are easy to prepare, such as fish, salads, pasta, etc.
- *“I have trouble carrying my grocery bags.”* Consider buying provisions for just a day or two, which will reduce the number of bags you have to carry. Take your bags home in an easy-to-manage cart on wheels, or have your groceries delivered.

- *“What can I do for those times when I’m not feeling that well?”* When you do have some energy, prepare fruits and vegetables for easy snacking. That way you can grab something healthy when you are not feeling as well. Add a piece of cheese or some nuts to make a satisfying snack that will give you a good energy boost.
- *“Is there anything I can do to prepare my meals?”* Plan your meals in advance and prepare larger quantities so you can freeze individual portions that will come in handy when your pain is more debilitating.
- *“What foods should I avoid?”* Stay away from foods containing refined sugar, salt and fat. Know which foods are good for you: if you’re not sure which those are, ask a health professional.
- *“Am I eating to feed my feelings?”* Emotional eating, such as eating out of boredom or stress, can be a serious problem. If you are struggling with this, be honest about it and get help, if necessary.

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A few recommendations for healthy eating:

- **Fresh fruits and vegetables:** It is better to eat them raw, but if you have trouble digesting them, cooking them is just fine!
- **Fish:** Easy to prepare and full of good food energy.
- **Red meat:** Eat this no more than once or twice a week.
- **Legumes:** True “super foods” that are an excellent and inexpensive source of energy.
- **Eggs:** Low in fat, high in energy. The perfect choice!
- **Unsalted nuts:** In small amounts, they are another good source of energy.
- **Dairy products:** Before eating them, make sure you are not lactose intolerant.

- **Sugar-free products:** Products without added sugar are preferred. Double check nutrition labels, you may be surprised to find out that sugar is added to many foods that otherwise look healthy! Even foods with more ‘natural’ sugars such as fruit, honey or maple syrup should be eaten in small quantities.
- **Read the nutrition facts label carefully before buying:** Ready-to-eat foods often contain too much sugar, salt and trans fats.
- **Season your food with herbs and spices.** They add flavour and appetizing aromas, and can help you consume less salt.

Remember that eating enough (but not too much), choosing healthy food and enjoying what you eat are absolutely essential to good physical and mental health.