

F.I.B.R.O.

S-Factors

Sleep, Serotonin & Sugar

by Margy Squires

What makes some people with fibromyalgia gain weight, while others do not? Is weight gain inevitable, even for those who have been “skinny all their lives”? Coincidence or a sign of the times? Reportedly, 60% of the population is overweight, according to statistics from the National Institutes of Health. Interestingly, the three S-factors linked to obesity are too common in fibromyalgia (FM). Sleep, serotonin and sugar. What’s more, the three are intractably linked to one another, so breaking the weight connection means tackling all of them.

Sleep. People who sleep 5-6 hours or less are more apt to be overweight or have trouble losing weight, says sleep researcher Eve Van Cauter of the University of Chicago. According to Cauter, lack of sleep increases the hormone that makes you feel hungry and decreases the hormone that makes you feel full, leading you to overeat. Refined carbs, the food of choice, affects insulin sensitivity or the body’s ability to recognize



and balance sugar levels. Sugar not used for fuel is stored as fat. The same study shows that those who sleep 7-8 hours, on the other hand, have less insulin resistance and a history of more stable weight. Given the disrupted stage IV sleep of FM, getting longer, deeper sleep may be part of the weight gain dilemma. What’s more, you cannot get quality sleep without adequate serotonin levels.

Serotonin. Serotonin is a neurotransmitter or chemical messenger secreted by the brain that affects our well-being. When we have enough serotonin, we feel happy, sleep well and have



less pain. Alcohol, coffee and stress are stimulants that increase cortisol, which triggers an increase in serotonin. Once serotonin reserves are depleted, we crash, feeling “down” and lethargic. Our bodies then crave sweets or carbs, trying to get that “up” feeling back. Unfortunately, the foods we choose are high in—you guessed it—sugar, spiking insulin levels. Increasing low serotonin levels with selective serotonin re-uptake inhibitors (SSRIs) is a common prescription for FM, as is the resulting weight gain from those SSRIs.

A natural alternative to increase serotonin is the supplement 5-HTP. In fact, the serotonin diet is one of the newest weight loss rages sweeping the country due to its ability to regulate hunger and curb carb cravings.



Sugar. During the low fat diet fad, people were buying foods labeled “low fat”. Fat, however, gives you the feeling of fullness and satiety. Guess what the food industry put



in so you wouldn’t miss the fat? Sugar, adding to the insulin fuel and, if not used, to fat storage. Refined carbs (white flour, bread, rice, etc) are easily converted to sugar, putting you on the insulin roller coaster. As soon as insulin spikes, it crashes, causing your brain

to send hunger signals to increase blood sugar levels by eating again. Lowering your intake of refined carbs and sugar is the obvious answer, but do so slowly or you’ll suffer sugar withdrawal headaches and extreme fatigue.

Switch to higher complex carbs (whole grains), which release sugar energy gradually and also add beneficial fiber. Intense sugar cravings may be a sign of yeast overgrowth since yeast needs sugar

to live. To cut cravings while you’re fighting yeast, try chromium glucose tolerance factor (GTF), and of course, 5-HTP.

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