

Health and Nutrition Tips for Multiple Sclerosis

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As an MS patient, you may have heard or read about special diets, vitamins, or supplements which are supposed to help MS. In reality, there is no specific diet or dietary supplementation which is known to cure or prevent MS. Some small studies have been conducted, but there are no conclusive results.

Overall, a balanced diet based on the food pyramid is recommended for MS patients, as it is for people who don't have MS. It is particularly important for people with MS to maintain a healthy weight, since this makes mobility easier and may help prevent strain which can lead to back, hip and knee pain.

Although it is easier to take supplements, the best nutrients come from plant sources. While meat and dairy products in moderation provide vitamins and minerals, our major source of nutrients is from vegetables, grains and fruit.

DIET

We recommend a diet low in saturated fat and high in fiber, with a fluid intake of 8 glasses a day of water or other non-caffeinated beverages.

Start by replacing saturated ("bad fat", which is found in meat and whole milk dairy products, with mono or poly unsaturated fats ("good fat"). FAT is important in the diet for a lot of reasons, but the reason we like it is because it makes us feel full and satisfied.

Foods rich in "good fat" include:

Oily fish- salmon, Atlantic herring and mackerel, bluefin tuna, sardines and codfish (2 servings a week is recommended).

Flaxseed, walnut, sunflower, soybean, corn, wheat germ, canola, grape seed, and safflower oil.

FIBER is important for bowel regulation, can help lower cholesterol levels, and can help you maintain a healthy weight by making you feel less hungry. Fiber is especially important for people with MS, since constipation is a common problem due to the disease itself, and also due to some of the medications prescribed for MS symptoms.

Foods rich in fiber include:

Grains such as whole wheat, oats, flax and brown rice

Vegetables

Fruit

Many cereals have high fiber content also- for example ½ cup of Fiber One Cereal contains 14 grams of fiber. This is almost half of your daily requirement (25 grams)

Vegetables which can be eaten raw or cooked, such as carrots, bell peppers, and tomatoes, have a higher fiber impact when eaten raw. Eating cooked vegetables such as potatoes with the skin on also adds to the fiber content.

The same is true for fruits- raw and with the peel on is best.

DIETARY SUPPLEMENTS

Discuss all supplements with the doctor before you start taking them. Supplements can have side effects, interactions with other medications, or can have a harmful effect on your health.

Fish oil contains n-3 fatty acids. Some studies suggest n-3 fatty acids may have an impact on the immune system and decrease disability progression in MS.

The recommended dose is 2000 mg daily

It is important to take a daily multivitamin or a vitamin E supplement when taking fish oils.

Fish oil may interact with blood thinners (anticoagulants), diabetes medicines (oral medicines as well as insulin) and medications for high blood pressure (antihypertensives)

Fish oil also interacts with some “water pills” (thiazide diuretics) such as Lasix

CALCIUM improves nerve conduction, muscle contraction and may have a mild suppressant effect on your immune system. It is also necessary for bone health.

Recommended dose: 1000-1500 mg daily

Various forms are available. Follow label instructions about taking with or without food.

Must take in divided doses or full benefit. (for example, 500mg three times a day)

Interacts with thiazide diuretics (“water pills” such as Lasix)

VITAMIN D is a vitamin and a hormone important for the absorption of calcium, and it may have a mild suppressant effect on your immune system.

Recommended dose: 800-1000 IU/day

Calcium supplements usually contain 200 IU of vitamin D per tablet

If you take Fosamax, ask your MD for Fosamax + Vitamin D (2800IU)

Ten minutes of sunlight on your face and arms is a natural source of Vitamin D

POTENTIALLY HARMFUL SUPPLEMENTS

There are supplements which should be avoided when you have MS because these supplements may interfere with your medication or stimulate your immune system. Do NOT take:

Immune Stimulating

Alfalfa
Aloe
Asian Ginseng
Astragalus
Beta-carotene
Cat's claw
Coenzyme Q10
DHEA
Echinacea
Garlic
Goldenseal
Grape seed extract
Melatonin
Oligomeric proanthocyanidins
Pycnogenol
Selenium
Siberian ginseng
Vitamin A
Vitamin C greater than 1000mg/day
Zinc

Interact with Steroids

Aloe
Asian ginseng
Bayberry
Licorice

Promote Fatigue

Asian ginseng
Chamomile
Nettle
Passionflower
Sage
Siberian ginseng
St. John's wort
Valerian