

# Nutrition and Parkinson's Disease

There is no evidence to suggest that specific diets or nutrients affect the progression of Parkinson's disease. However, good nutrition is essential to the overall well-being of people at both early and late stages of Parkinson's disease. Achieving good nutrition involves eating a variety of foods each day, in amounts adequate to meet individual needs.

## Bone Health

People with Parkinson's are prone to osteoporosis, a disease caused by low bone-mineral density. Osteoporosis can be especially worrisome to a person with Parkinson's who faces an increased risk of falling. Diet and activity are key factors in preventing osteoporosis. Dietary requirements include calcium and vitamin D.

Foods high in calcium include: dairy products, fortified soy milk, fortified orange juice, and canned fish with bones (salmon or sardines), baked beans, almonds, and broccoli.

Vitamin D is obtained primarily from eating fortified milk products and also from exposure to sunlight. Many people have difficulty obtaining enough calcium and vitamin D and may need to take supplements.

## Constipation

Constipation is one of the most common problems experienced by many people living with Parkinson's disease. Factors include: poor appetite, inadequate physical activity, medication side-effects, and effects of the disease on the intestine.

Three tips to maintaining regularity are: increase fluid, add fiber and engage in physical activity.

- **Increase fluid intake:** Drink sufficient fluid each day (soup, juice, milk, water preferred over coffee and alcoholic beverages).
- **Add fibre:** High fibre foods include bran, whole grain cereals and breads, fruits and vegetables, and dried beans, peas, and lentils.
- **Physical activity:** Use the *Chart Your Progress* sheet found on the back of the *Parkinson Canada's Exercise Book* to track your daily physical activity.

**See your physician if constipation persists. Ask us about the Bowel Management Program.**

## Body Weight

There are several reasons for weight loss in Parkinson's. Involuntary movements (i.e. tremors) burn lots of energy. Symptoms of depression, common in Parkinson's disease, can result in decreased appetite and further likelihood of weight loss.

To eat enough, it may be necessary to have small, frequent meals, and to include some high calorie foods (cream, ice cream, butter, sauces, special high calorie drinks, and desserts).

## Swallowing Problems

Swallowing difficulties may become a problem as Parkinson's disease progresses. Warning signs include: coughing or choking while eating/drinking, gurgled voice after eating, excessive chewing or drooling, delayed/absent swallow, pocketing of food in the mouth.

People with these symptoms should see their physician and should be assessed by a trained swallowing professional; diet and feeding modifications may be needed.

You may refer to Parkinson Canada's *Swallowing Issues* resource.

## What About Supplements?

Many people ask about using supplements. You may need to speak to your doctor about your specific needs. You may not need additional supplements than what you get through a balanced diet.

Keep in mind that natural herbal products may not necessarily be safe and could potentially interfere with your Parkinson's medications. Check with your doctor or pharmacist.

The safest approach is to take a daily, moderate-dose multivitamin with mineral supplements (a variety of brands are suitable).

## Protein Restriction: Is It Necessary?

People may have heard of a protein restriction diet. For some people, protein interferes with the effectiveness of their medication. They can avoid the problem by NOT eating high protein foods at the time medication is taken.

Protein restriction is not necessary nor is it recommended for most people with Parkinson's disease, as it can encourage malnutrition. For more details, see our *Levodopa and Protein* information sheet.

## Nutrition-Related Medication Side-Effects

Nausea, vomiting and poor appetite are common side-effects of medications used to treat Parkinson's disease. Many of these side-effects decrease as medication tolerance develops.

If nausea persists, it may be beneficial to take medications with food (e.g., crackers, cookies, or fruit). If this is not helpful, see your physician, as you may need a medication for nausea.

### ONLINE RESOURCES

Canada's Food Guide (2007) <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/food-guide-aliment/index-eng.php>

Dietitian of Canada [www.dietitians.ca](http://www.dietitians.ca) (click on Eat Well Live Well link)

Osteoporosis Society of Canada <http://www.osteoporosis.ca> (click on Programs and Resources link)

Physical Activity Guide for Older Adults: <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/hp-ps/hl-mvs/pag-gap/older-aines/index-eng.php>

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