

# Importance of Nutrition with Parkinson's Disease

There are many things that are difficult to control when you are living with Parkinson's Disease. One thing you can control, and that can have a positive impact on your symptoms, is the food that you put into your body. There are so many foods that are good for your body as a whole and good for your brain that would be beneficial to incorporate into your daily diet. Your diet can be a tool that you can use to increase your energy, better your mood, promote good gut health, and feed your brain what it needs!

## **The Good Brain Foods!**

There are certain foods that contain vitamins and minerals that are directly linked to positively affecting the health of your brain. These foods also are high in fiber and contain antioxidants which help with digestion and bowel/bladder function.

- ***Fresh fruits***

- Examples: berries, apples, apricots, cherries, figs, plums, red grapes, and tomatoes

- ***Vegetables***

- Examples: kale, collard greens, spinach, broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, asparagus, peppers, onions, mushrooms, carrots, brussel sprouts

- **Healthy Fats** - Omega-3 and Omega-6 are the best fatty acids
  - Omega-3 Examples: salmon, halibut, shrimp, trout, walnuts, flax seeds, chia seeds, hemp seeds, seaweed, and brussels sprouts
  - Omega-6 Examples: corn, soy, meat, poultry, eggs, coconut oil, avocado oil, pumpkin seeds, sunflower seeds, and peanut butter

## The Bad Brain Foods

There are certain foods that do not benefit brain health and that are overall not beneficial to your body as a whole. These foods should try to be avoided as much as possible but it may not be realistic for you to cut them out completely.

- **Added/Refined Sugar** - too much added sugar is linked to poorer memory and thinking as well as increased rates of diabetes, various heart diseases, and strokes. It is recommended that men eat less than 9 teaspoons of sugar and women eat less than 6 teaspoons of sugar per day.
- **Unhealthy Fats (trans and saturated fats)** - too many unhealthy fats can increase inflammation in the body and can clog blood vessels. Increased inflammation and clogged blood vessels can lead to various heart and brain diseases. Products such as red meats, butter, cheese, baked goods, french fries, and coffee creamers all contain unhealthy fats. These foods should be consumed in moderation.
- **Sodium** - too much sodium can lead to increased blood pressure, heart disease, kidney disease, and can damage blood vessels. It is recommended to consume less than 2300 mg of sodium per day. Always talk to your health care team to determine how much sodium you should be intaking per day.

## **A Healthy Balanced Diet Is Best!**

In general, a plate that contains half fruits and veggies and half proteins and grains is a good, healthy plate!

- **Protein** - lean cuts of meat are best
  - Examples: chicken breast, pork tenderloin, trimmed chicken thighs, top round or sirloin beef, seafood, eggs, soy products, beans, chickpeas, lentils, and peas
- **Whole Grains** -
  - Examples: brown/black/wild rice, quinoa, barley, millet, buckwheat, oats, whole wheat bread or pasta, and fresh corn

## **How Do Foods Affect Parkinson's Medications**

- High levels of protein can interfere with the effectiveness and longevity of levodopa. It is recommended that medication is taken 30-60 minutes before you eat or 1-2 hours after you eat.

## **Eating to Ease Symptoms**

- **Swallowing Problems** - soft foods and thickened liquids will be easier to swallow and foods that have lots of seasoning or that are sour may stimulate the swallow reflex. If there are significant swallowing difficulties, consult with a speech and language pathologist to find swallowing and eating strategies that are effective and that reduce the risk of choking and aspiration.
- **Low Blood Pressure** - some Parkinson's medications can lower blood pressure. If you are feeling dizzy or faint, drinking a sports drink with sodium and electrolytes and eating a salty snack like crackers or chips can help raise your blood pressure. Limiting caffeine and alcohol and also help control blood pressure.

- Constipation - drinking enough fluids and eating high fiber foods is going to be important in combatting constipation. If you are eating high amounts of fiber, be sure you are also drinking high amounts of liquids because eating lots of fiber without fluids may increase your constipation.
  - It is recommended that a person drinks 0.5 ounces for every pound they weigh. So, if someone weighs 150 pounds, they should be drinking 75 ounces of water per day.
- Urinary Incontinence - If drinking fluids during the day leads to increased frequency and urgency, try getting your fluids in by eating foods that are high in water. These foods include tomatoes, cucumbers, radishes, celery, broccoli, and grapefruit.

## Recommended Daily Servings

Fruits - 2 cups per day

Vegetables - 2.5 cups per day

Protein - 5.5 ounces per day

Grains - 5 ounces per day

\*\* Visit <https://www.myplate.gov/> for more information about the recommended daily servings of fruits, vegetables, protein, grains, and dairy.