

Healthy Eating Guidelines for Multiple Sclerosis

Multiple sclerosis (MS) is a chronic disease that affects your central nervous system. Over time it can slow or block the nerve signals that control how well your muscles work together and how strong they are. It may cause tingling or pain in parts of your body and decreased vision. Other symptoms of MS can include:

- | Feeling tired
- | Depression
- | Changes in how you think
- | Swallowing problems
- | Movement problems
- | Disability.

MS can affect people differently. The information in this handout may not be the best for you if you are underweight, losing weight without trying or have trouble swallowing or eating. Your nutrition needs can change over time. Speak with your health care provider or registered dietitian to help you meet your nutrition needs.



Steps you can take

1. Eat a healthy, well-balanced diet high in vegetables, fruit, whole grains and protein foods. Use your plate as a guide:
 - | Aim to fill half of your plate with a variety of vegetables and fruits. They are a great source of vitamins, minerals and antioxidants.
 - | Aim to fill a quarter of your plate with whole grains such as oats, quinoa, barley, brown or wild rice, and whole grain bread and pasta.
 - | Aim to fill a quarter of your plate with protein foods such as beans, peas and lentils, fish and seafood, lean meat, poultry, and tofu, nuts, seeds and their butters, eggs, milk, yogurt, and

fortified soy beverage.

2. Choose foods with healthy fats. Aim to replace saturated fats in your diet with unsaturated fats. There are two main types of unsaturated fats.
 - | Monounsaturated fats, which include peanuts, nuts, avocados, non-hydrogenated margarines, and oils such as olive, canola, peanut, sunflower and safflower.
 - | Polyunsaturated fats, which include nuts, seeds (e.g. flax, chia and hemp), oily fishes such as herring, salmon, mackerel and trout, most plant oils (e.g. canola, soybean, sunflower, safflower), grains and non-hydrogenated soft margarines.

Limit sources of saturated fat, such as:

- | Fatty meats, full-fat milk and milk products such as cream and cheese, fats such as butter, lard, shortening, palm, palm kernel, and coconut oils, and some processed foods such as packaged snacks and sweets.
3. Limit highly processed foods. These foods and drinks are high in added sugar, sodium or saturated fat. They are often low in the nutrients that help keep us healthy. If you eat these foods, eat them less often or in smaller amounts.

Highly processed foods can include:

- | sugary drinks such as pop, soda, sweetened coffee and tea beverages, lemonade and fruit drinks
 - | chips and other snack foods
 - | instant noodles and packaged soups
 - | deep fried foods
 - | sweetened cereals, candy, ice cream
 - | baked goods such as pie, cake, donuts and cookies
 - | processed meat, such as sausages, deli meats, burgers
 - | frozen entrees, such as pizza, lasagna and appetizers.
4. Meet your nutrient needs for calcium and vitamin D.

People with MS have a higher risk of low bone mineral density and breaking bones. Calcium is one of the building blocks of strong

bones. Your body needs vitamin D to help absorb calcium.

- | Good food sources of calcium include dairy products (milk, yogurt and lower fat cheese), unsweetened fortified soy beverage, tofu with added calcium and canned fish with the bones.
- | Food sources of vitamin D include milk, unsweetened fortified soy beverage, fatty fish such as salmon and eggs.
- | Health Canada recommends that all adults over the age of 50 take a daily vitamin D supplement of 400 IU.

5. Be cautious with overly restrictive diets.

You may read about diets that claim to decrease symptoms or stop MS from getting worse. Many of these diets, such as the Swank, MacDougal, Kousmine and gluten-free, restrict nutritious foods and have not been proven to be helpful for MS.

6. Be cautious with herbal products.

There is not enough research to recommend any herbal product for MS. Some can affect how medications work. If you want to try herbal products, talk with your health care provider or pharmacist first.

7. Focus on an overall healthy lifestyle.

- | Being physically active is safe for most people. Check with your health care provider or a qualified exercise professional to see what types and amounts of activities are best for you.
- | Be smoke free. Smoking may speed up the progression of MS.



Additional Resources

For information and advice based on your specific food and nutrition needs and preferences, call 8-1-1 and ask to speak to a HealthLink BC dietitian.

For additional information, see the following resources:

- 1 HealthLink BC www.healthlinkbc.ca – Get medically approved non-emergency health information.
- 1 Dietitian Services Fact Sheets - Available by mail (call 8-1-1) or visit www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthy-eating

These resources are provided as sources of additional information believed to be reliable and accurate at the time of publication and should not be considered an endorsement of any information, service, product or company.



Notes

Distributed by:

Dietitian Services at HealthLinkBC (formerly Dial-A-Dietitian), providing free nutrition information and resources for BC residents and health professionals. Go to www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthy-eating or call 8-1-1 (anywhere in BC). Interpreters are available in over 130 languages.