

BUILDING BLOCKS OF HEALTH

Nutrition & Parkinson's



Written by: Shameem Kizar, BsC RD, Kaye Edmonton Clinic, Movement Disorders Program

When we talk about complementary therapies and what is best for people with Parkinson disease, there often are questions about what is the best diet, how should I incorporate protein, or what vitamins/supplements are beneficial? It is important to note that there is no one diet, vitamin, or supplement that is proven best for people with Parkinson's. Nor will any cure, reverse, or slow down the progression of Parkinson disease. Rather, incorporating a healthy diet and appropriate vitamins/supplements can help improve one's overall health and address some Parkinson's related issues such as constipation, muscle retention, and fatigue. This article includes nutritional information on a variety of topics.

Nutrition and PD

Are you confused by all the information out there on nutrition? Who do you trust – your GP, Google, Tik Tok, your neighbours's aunt's cousin's friend??? It can be very confusing and honestly it can make your head swim. We live in an age where too much information availability might not be as beneficial as we think.

When it comes to healthy eating for Parkinson's, I like to take the approach of balanced eating. What is balanced eating? It's basically eating a variety of foods in the right proportions to maintain health. It's making sure you have all the building blocks of nutrition to meet your requirements. There are many

good examples of balanced eating: The Mediterranean pattern of eating, Nordic diet, Blue Zone diet, DASH, etc. A good visual is Canada's Food Guide:

A balanced diet should contain plenty of vegetables and fruit (your source of vitamins, minerals, fibre, antioxidants), good sources of protein (for muscle maintenance, maintain your immune function) and whole grains (great source for energy, fibre, prebiotics).

Let's break this down and see how you can easily incorporate these into your routine.

Vegetables and Fruit

How many vegetables and fruits should I have? The easiest suggestion I can give is to try to incorporate them to every meal and snack and you'll be getting enough. Here are some suggestions:

- a Add ½ cup of fruit (especially berries) to your breakfast.
- a Throw in a big handful of spinach into the pan first, wilt, season then throw in eggs for scrambled eggs with more pizzaz.
- a Like a breakfast sandwich? First, make it at home (more nutritious and economical) and consider adding veggies (mushrooms, pepper, spinach) to your eggs or have a layer of the veggies in the sandwich.
- a Smoothie for breakfast – great way to add veggies and fruit.
- a Add berries, cut up or grated apple or carrot, canned pumpkin to oatmeal along with spices.
- a Challenge yourself to add at least 4 vegetable toppings to your sandwich.
- a Soup is a great vehicle to add vegetables (even frozen mixed veggies work) this includes ready to serve canned or packaged soups like instant ramen.



Protein

As we age, we lose muscle and often eat less protein, which our bodies use to maintain muscle (which is important especially for those with Parkinson's). Protein is used much more effectively and efficiently in smaller amounts but more frequently throughout the day. When we eat excess protein, it doesn't get stored as muscle, instead it gets stored as fat (which we need) but we covet muscle more. I suggest you aim for 20 to 30 grams protein at each meal to meet requirements.

Most people eat the majority of their protein at dinner, but you could use your protein more effectively if we gave breakfast and lunch some protein love. Try these:

- a ½ cup of cottage cheese at breakfast or lunch will get you ~ 17 grams protein
- a Switch your regular yogurt to Greek or Icelandic yogurt (it has double the amount in the same volume – 4 g vs 8 g in 100 g container)
- a Oatmeal your go to in the morning? Cook it with cow's milk or soy milk as they are both high in protein. This makes your oatmeal more protein dense in the same volume.
- a Hemp hearts, chia seed, flax seed, pumpkin seeds or sunflowers seeds added to yogurt, oatmeal, cereal are all great ways to increase protein content of your meal choices
- a Have 2 or 3 eggs as a serving vs one (12-18 g vs 6 g protein)
- a If having a salad as a meal choice, make sure it has protein. Add leftover chicken, meat or fish from the night before. Add boiled eggs, canned fish, canned beans or lentils, cubed tofu to make it hearty. The addition of nuts and seeds are also great ways to add protein.
- a Peanut butter sandwich your go to? Make sure you have at least 2 tablespoons (8g protein) in a 2-slice sandwich. Consider your bread choice – the more nuts and seeds in the bread the higher the protein content. Consider a sprinkle of hemp hearts or chis seeds on top of the peanut butter to also increase protein content.



Whole Grains

Carbohydrates have gotten a bad rap for the last couple of years but not all carbohydrates are equal. Carbohydrates are used in your body as energy aka fuel. They are also an excellent source of fibre which is important for bowel regularity and used to feed healthy bacteria in your gut. Your healthiest options and best bet for balanced eating are to choose whole grains.

When you look at an ingredient list, you should see the words "whole grain whole ----:" For example to make sure your whole wheat bread is in fact a whole grain, you would see "whole grain whole wheat" listed not enriched or partially enriched (these aren't whole grains). Other examples of whole grains are rice including basmati, jasmine and brown, oats, farro, barley, quinoa, rye, etc.

Here are some suggestions to incorporate for more balanced eating.

- a Excellent bread choices would be made from whole grain whole wheat, whole grain whole rye, whole grain mixed nuts/seedy breads, breads made with rolled oats, quinoa.
- a Choose sourdough bread made from active cultures.
- a Try some other grains as a new side option. Think amaranth, millet, buckwheat & wild rice.
- a Try ancient wheat varieties like Einkorn, Emmer/Farro, Kamut® & spelt.
- a Choose 100% durum wheat pasta (more fibre and protein) as a good whole grain alternative to partially or enriched wheat.



So, if I eat a "balanced" diet do I need to take supplements? Are there certain vitamins that are recommended for people with Parkinson disease?

Generally, if you eat a variety of foods more frequently than most likely a supplement isn't necessary. The exception to this for people with Parkinson's is vitamin D and B12.

The amount of vitamin D found in foods is not adequate to meet needs. Taking at least 1000 IU/d of vitamin D every day (all year long) from a supplement ensures you are getting enough especially in our northern climate.

With B12, as we age, our body is unable to absorb vitamin B12 as well. Eating whole grains, as well as animal products like meat, fish, chicken, dairy is helpful, however when you are on a dopamine replacement medication you do not absorb enough vitamin B12. It is not a bad idea to have your doctor check levels or you can take 1000 mcg safely with no interaction seen with levodopa. Vitamin B12 supplements can be found in pill, sublingual, and spray options.

Is additional magnesium recommended? Is there enough in the food I eat? Does more magnesium help me sleep better?

Magnesium is a mineral which plays an important role in the body. It's part of building muscle and bone, regulating blood sugar, blood pressure, and muscle and nerve function. It also plays a role as an electrical conductor that contracts muscles and makes the heartbeat steadily. Magnesium may help regulate neurotransmitters that are directly related to sleep. You may be at risk for magnesium deficiency if you are;

- a An older adult
- a Have type 2 diabetes
- a Have a gastrointestinal disorder
- a Have an alcohol use disorder

If you eat a balanced diet, you are likely to get an adequate amount of magnesium. Good sources of magnesium are nuts, seeds, leafy greens, whole grains, beans, beef, salmon, poultry and dairy. If you decide to take a supplement, be mindful the safe maximum is no more than 350 mg per day and that magnesium can have a laxative effect at high doses. Speak to your doctor, pharmacist or dietitian to make sure you are on the correct dose.

Embrace eating balanced meals and your body and mind will be thankful.