


Nutrition for Parkinson's Disease

Laura J. Kruskall, PhD, RDN, CSSD, LD, FACS, FAND
Associate Professor, UNLV Nutrition Sciences
Director, UNLV Nutrition Center


Diet & Nutrition

- There is no specific medical nutrition therapy for PD → current guidelines exist and an individualized plan is recommended
- Maintaining overall health and an anti-inflammatory eating pattern is recommended
- Mediterranean diet pattern may slow cognitive decline
- Medication may require some mealtime considerations
- Dietary changes may help ease certain symptoms
- These are general guidelines and do not replace individualized advice from your physician or RDN




General Nutrition Recommendations

- Avoid "fad diets" → These are generally not evidence-based and promote false promises
- Choose a dietary pattern low in saturated fat/trans fats
- A Mediterranean style diet pattern is the easiest to maintain and promotes overall health
 - Rich in fruits & vegetables
 - Whole grains/quality carbohydrates (those that are minimally processed)
 - Healthy fats/oils
 - Lean proteins
 - Lots of plant sources



General Nutrition Recommendations

- Limit sugar intake → Excess sugar tends to be inflammatory and may contribute to excess calories
- Choose foods rich in antioxidants
 - These include brightly and dark colored fruits & vegetables (especially berries, grapes), green tea, coffee, juices, dark chocolate (70% cacao) curcumin/turmeric
 - "Eat from the rainbow" to get a variety of phytonutrients/phytochemicals
- Consume alcohol in moderation, if at all → it is full of empty calories



Easing PD Symptoms with Nutrition

Possible Symptoms/Considerations:

Constipation


- Drink plenty of fluid and eat fiber rich foods (whole grains, fruits, vegetables)
- Warm beverages, especially in the morning may help bowel movements
- Fiber supplements, crushed bran, or prune juice may help

Hydration

- Staying hydrated is important, but don't want to increase urinary urgency if this is a challenge
- Can also eat foods high in water content such as citrus fruits, watermelon

Muscle Cramping

- Consuming the spice turmeric or drinking tonic water may help
- Salt & vinegar may work too, but make sure your physician approves



Easing PD Symptoms with Nutrition

Possible Symptoms/Considerations:

Vitamin D Status


- Talk to your physician/healthcare provider about getting your vitamin D level tested for adequacy
- Research is conflicting about a specific recommended daily dose for PD, but adequate vitamin D for good health is established

Weight Loss

- Some people with PD may not eat enough due to difficulty swallowing, nausea from medications, or movement challenges that make meal prepping and eating difficult.
- Some people experience increased energy expenditure due to tremor and related physical symptoms
- Consider adding higher-calorie foods containing healthy fats (nuts, nut butters, avocado, olive oil, prepared shakes)

Swallowing Difficulties

- Coughing, choking, or feeling that food is stuck
- A speech pathologist can diagnose the correct food and fluid consistencies for you
- Softening, cutting, or mincing foods may help
- Foods that stimulate swallowing may help (seasoned, sour, carbonated)
- Smaller bites & eating at a slower pace/smaller frequent meals



Easing PD Symptoms with Nutrition

Medication Challenges

- Food & medications can interact
- Possible side effects of medications: dry mouth, nausea/vomiting, appetite loss, insomnia, fatigue, anxiety
- Levodopa medications work best on an empty stomach, so follow instructions
- However, sometimes taking these on an empty stomach leads to nausea → work with healthcare provider on plan
 - Maybe a small snack like crackers, applesauce, or a banana can help tolerate
- Taking meds close to a protein-rich meal (meat, fish, eggs, dairy, nuts, beans) may interfere with the absorption of the drug, making it work more slowly or less effectively
- May need to re-distribute protein meals around medication

Iron supplementation can decrease absorption of levodopa → don't take within 2-3 hours

Follow a tyramine-restricted diet

- Avoid aged & fermented meats, sausages, salami, pickled herring, sauerkraut, aged cheeses, red wines, soy sauce, tofu, any non-fresh/spoiled meat, any supplement containing tyramine



Current Areas of Nutrition & PD Research

Some people with PD may be deficient in CoEnzyme Q10, glutathione, B vitamins, vitamins C & D

- Adequate levels in diet recommended until more research evolves → Mediterranean Diet Pattern
- May want to supplement with a MVM with adequate vitamins C, E, B vitamins (make sure healthcare provider knows)
- Need more research on any benefits of supplementation

Omega-3 fatty acids may improve inflammation

- Well established as a principle in anti-inflammatory eating
- Must get the active forms (EPA & DHA) from fatty fish or certain types of algae
- Need more research, but 1-4 g/day of EPA/DHA may be warranted, under physicians care

Keeping the gut microbiome healthy may be warranted

- Probiotic supplements and prebiotics as food sources may reduce inflammation and keep the correct balance of gut microbes
- Probiotics are live organisms → make sure physician knows/recommends
- Not approved by the FDA → caution with purchase



Putting Changes Into Effect

- It's ok to make small changes rather than all at once
- There are many members of the medical team who can help
 - Physician: medical care
 - RDN: food & nutrition
 - Occupational Therapist: assistive devices to make meal prepping and eating easier
 - Physical Therapist: movement therapy
 - Speech-Language Pathologist: swallowing difficulties
- Remember, these are guidelines and do not replace the advice of your physician or an RDN working on an individualized plan for you

