

A balanced Diet is essential to the efficient running of your body. It will help to maintain a healthy lifestyle, reduce fatigue and aid the immune system to battle infection. There are no quick fixes. The only tricks are to eat foods that are nutritious, drink plenty of water and exercise regularly.

For those with MS there are certain food groups that may help your body to cope better with some symptoms you experience.

A Balanced Diet

The Food Pyramid across, details the types of food and the amount of each we should eat each day. The four main food groups are as follows:

Proteins: Found in **Diary** products and **Meat**

Eating foods rich in protein encourages cell growth, muscle development and aid carbohydrates in giving us energy. Protein rich foods are meats, cheese, eggs, pulses and fish.

Carbohydrates: Found in **Breads/ Cereals**

This food group gives us energy and fibre (found in some carbohydrates) aids digestion and reduces constipation. Foods rich in good carbohydrates are: wholemeal bread, cereals (wheat, oats, corn), pasta and rice, potatoes and pulses.

Fruits and Vegetables

Our main source of vitamins and minerals come from fruit and vegetables. They help the body by assisting in growth, digestion and many other functions.

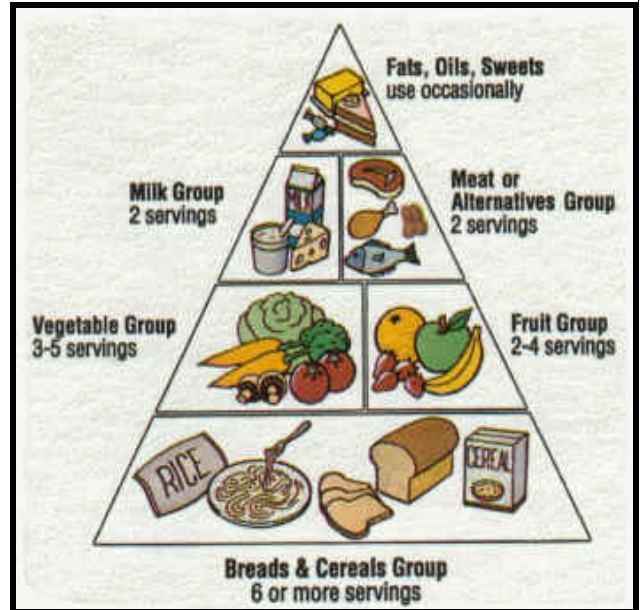
Fats Found in **oils**

Fat are an important source of energy and fatty acids which help the nervous system. There are three types of fats.

Saturated Found mainly in animal products and associated with high cholesterol

Monosaturated Found mainly in avocados, olive oils and nuts

Polyunsaturated Found mainly in vegetable oils and seeds. Contains essential fatty acids



The Food Pyramid—Daily servings for a Balanced Diet

Tips For a Balanced Diet

Eat three balanced meals a day at regular intervals.

Drink 2 litres of water a day, preferably not as tea/coffee.

Vitamin or mineral supplements may not be needed if you are eating a balanced diet. However, certain drug treatments may deplete your body of vitamins and minerals. Consult your GP.

Grill, steam, bake or poach food instead of frying. Cut the fat off meat.

MS Specific Diet

There is no conclusive scientific evidence that any particular diet is wholly beneficial for a person with MS. However, there are certain vitamins, minerals and fatty acids that can help the nervous system.

Essential Fatty Acids

These are found in polyunsaturated fats such as linoleic and alpha-linoleic acid. These acids help maintain the central nervous system and in particular the myelin sheath covering the nerves. Linoleic acid is found in sunflower and soya oils and margarines such as Flora and Linusit Gold which have no hydrogenated fat. Alpha-linoleic acid is found in dark green leafy vegetables such as broccoli, green cabbage, lettuce. It can also be found in oily fish like tuna, salmon and mackerel.

Supplements can also be taken such as evening primrose, starflower and wheat-germ oil.

Vitamins and Minerals

The vitamin B12 and the mineral folic acid are important for a healthy nervous system. Good sources of vitamin B12 are red meat, oily fish and dairy products. Folic acid rich foods are liver, leafy green vegetables, high fibre breakfast cereals, pulses, nuts and dairy products.

Antioxidants

As well as minimising the risk of heart disease, antioxidants such as Beta carotene and vitamins A, C and E help maintain a healthy nervous system. Ensure you eat lots of fresh fruit and vegetables every day to ensure a sufficient supply of antioxidants.

Consult your Doctor or a Dietician for more details.

Sample Meal Plan

Breakfast

Fruit or fruit juice
Wholegrain cereal with low fat milk
Wholemeal bread and polyunsaturated margarine
Marmalade/honey/jam

Mid-Morning

Fruit
Tea/coffee with low fat milk

Lunch

Homemade low fat soup e.g. lentil or vegetable
25g lean meat/tuna in brine/oily fish/low-fat
cheese/poultry/125g baked beans
Large helping of salad vegetables incl. Linseed,
nuts
Fruit or low-fat or diet yoghurt
Tea/coffee with low-fat milk

Mid-afternoon

Low-fat yoghurt/fruit

Dinner

75g lean meat/chicken/oily fish or 125g white fish

or vegetarian bean dish (include nuts, pulses and seeds)

Large helping of vegetables, particularly dark green vegetables/peas.
Potatoes/pasta/rice
Low fat gravy or low fat milk white sauce.

Dessert

Jelly/low fat milk pudding/stewed fruit and low-fat custard/low fat fromage frais

Foods to avoid

Meat fat, processed meats, luncheon meat, cream, ice-cream, rich cakes, biscuits, pastry, chocolate, crisps, fried food, butter, saturated cooking oil, full fat cheese and milk, fatty sauces, mayonnaise, salad cream, cream soups.

Recommended foods

All fruits and vegetables, fruit juices, low fat cottage cheese, low-fat milk and yoghurts, very lean meat and poultry, oily fish, boiled/baked potatoes, clear soups, fat-free homemade soups, rice, pasta, cereals.

Complementing your Diet

The following are a few factors associated with diet and nutrition.

Water

Bladder problems are sometimes associated with a low intake of water. Many people reduce the amount of fluid to limit the amount of toilet trips, but this is not advised. Low amounts of concentrated urine can encourage infection and irritate the bladder. Low fluid intake can also cause constipation.

To reduce the occurrence of bladder problems ensure you drink 1-2 litres of water a day. Tea, coffee and alcohol can increase the need to pass urine so avoid them if they cause you problems.

Fibre

A sufficient intake of fibre will help to prevent constipation and keep your bowels healthy. Eating the recommended amount of fruit and vegetables will ensure sufficient fibre intake. Fibre absorbs fluid, so if you increase your fibre intake you should increase your fluid intake.

Over or underweight

Weight loss may occur in people with MS due to loss of appetite. It can decrease your resistance to infection and if you are sedentary, may increase the risk of pressure sores. Weight gain may occur if MS causes you to do less exercise. It can cause mobility problems and can strain the respiratory and circulatory systems. If your weight is becoming a problem contact your Doctor or a Dietician for advice.

Alcohol

Alcohol does not need to be banned if you have MS, but if you do drink, do so in moderation. Official guidelines state that women should drink no more than 2 units a day and men 3 units per day. A unit is a small glass of wine or half a pint of beer.

Alcohol should not be taken with certain drugs. Ask your Doctor for advice.

If Swallowing is Difficult

Some people with MS have trouble swallowing, particularly if they are tired. Difficulties usually occur due to weakness or poor co-ordination of movement. If you have problems swallowing try taking smaller mouthfuls and eating soft, minced or easy to chew food with sauce or gravy. A speech and language therapist may also be of help.

Exercise

Exercise not only helps to control weight, but helps by increasing mobility, strengthens your heart and makes the most of your potential muscle strength. Exercise does not mean having to join a gym or climbing mountains. One of the most beneficial forms of exercise is walking. Whether it's walking around the garden or going for a stroll, it can all be beneficial. If you have reduced mobility, working with a physiotherapist will be helpful.

Diet and Fatigue

Eating the right foods is one thing. Buying the right foods, preparing the right foods and cooking the right foods can be difficult if fatigue affects you. Below are some ideas on how you can help reduce the effects of fatigue while cooking.

If you feel too tired to cook, keep a store of ready made frozen meals that you can heat up in the oven or microwave. Alternatively, keep a stack of menus from places that deliver. Take away food is not as nutritious, so don't depend on it too heavily.

If you have trouble reaching food items or utensils in your shelves ask someone to help you rearrange your kitchen. Put most used food items in easy to reach places, or install roller shelving.

Diet and Fatigue

- **Soak pots and pans instead of scrubbing**
- Sit or perch when preparing food.
- **Use labour saving gadgets such as choppers, electric blenders and food processors.**

Convenience food are great if used sparingly. Sometimes they contain excess salt and sugar and too little vital vitamins and minerals. Snack on things like fruit or cereals. Avoid sweets and biscuits.

- Prepare food earlier in the day if you know you'll be tired later in the day.
- **Use a damp cloth or a non-slip mat to keep items in place while using them.**

Plan your meal well in advance so you can factor in rest periods and how long something will take to prepare and cook

If possible, try buying groceries on-line (via the internet). All the bigger supermarkets offer this service. Alternatively, ask your local shop to deliver your groceries or ask a family member or a friend to do the shopping for you.

- **As well as cutting down cooking time, a microwave will save on cleaning time too.**
- Line baking tins with foil, to cut down on cleaning time

- Instead of lifting heavy pots and pans, slide them across the work surface
- **Prepare double the amount when you are able and freeze the excess for another day.**

If you are too tired to eat a whole meal, make your meals smaller and eat more frequently i.e. have 5/6 small meals a day

For Further Information

Regional Services

Each Region has a designated team that will be able to offer a range of services and facilities that may complement the information in this Information Sheet. Working from many locations around the Country, these trained professionals are experienced in the area of MS. Contact the national help line number for details of your local Regional Office.

Other Literature

www.healthpromotion.ie

www.mssociety.org.uk

www.mssociety.ca

Or contact you local office or the National Help line on 1850 233 233 for more information

Other Information Leaflets Available

Available now:

- Fatigue
- Diet
- Stress

- Aids and Appliances
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