Nutrition & Parkinson's



Foods to Include in a Healthy Diet

- Colorful fruits and vegetables, including frozen or home-canned options
- Leafy greens
- Beans
- Fatty fish
- Whole grains
- Poultry
- Dark berries
- Fresh fruits
- Nuts and seeds
- Olive oil and other healthy fats

Food is more than just fuel for the body; it can be a powerful tool in managing Parkinson's disease (PD). Whole, nutrient-dense foods and healthy fats can help ease the symptoms.

Quick Facts

- Your gut and brain are closely connected. What you eat helps shape the bacteria in your gut that communicate with your brain
- A healthy diet may help ease some Parkinson's symptoms and support brain health.
- A healthy diet focuses on balance and variety, not restriction.

Why is nutrition important in Parkinson's?

Eating nourishing foods and staying hydrated may help ease some symptoms of Parkinson's, such as digestive problems, and may support thinking, mood and sleep. A healthy diet can also help reduce inflammation and oxidative stress in the body, which contribute to cell damage and may play a role in the progression of PD symptoms.

What foods can help specific Parkinson's challenges?

- **Constipation and digestive issues —** Drink 6 to 8 glasses (8 ounces each) of fluids daily, unless your care team advises otherwise. Add high-fiber foods slowly, such as oatmeal, beans, berries, and ground flaxseed. Cut back on fried and sugary foods.

- **Swallowing changes —** Choose moist, soft foods that hold together, such as soups, scrambled eggs, yogurt and pureed (blended smooth) foods. Sit upright, take small bites and eat slowly. Use thickened liquids only with guidance from a speech-language pathologist, also called a speech therapist.

- **Maintaining weight —** Eat small, frequent meals and snack between them, cook with olive oil, avocado, cream, or coconut milk, and drink nutrient-rich smoothies. If you are losing weight without trying, tell your health care team or dietitian.

Resources

Read, Watch & Listen:

- **Parkinson.org/Library** search "nutrition"

Learn More:

Diet & Nutrition

- **Parkinson.org/Nutrition**

Swallowing Changes

- **Parkinson.org/Swallowing**

Mealtimes & Dining Out

- **Parkinson.org/Mealtime**

Helpline

For answers to your Parkinson's questions, contact our Helpline at **1-800-473-4636** or **Helpline@Parkinson.org**.

We are here for you.

What diets should I follow?

There is no one-size-fits-all diet for Parkinson's. The best plan is flexible, enjoyable and fits your symptoms and lifestyle.

Two dietary approaches that have shown promise for Parkinson's:

1. **Mediterranean diet**
   Includes colorful fruits and vegetables, beans, whole grains, poultry, nuts, seeds, fatty fish and olive oil.
2. **MIND diet**
   (Mediterranean-DASH intervention for neurodegenerative delay) A combination of Mediterranean and DASH eating patterns that emphasizes foods such as leafy greens, vegetables, berries, nuts and whole grains.

How does protein affect medications?

Levodopa is a key PD medication. For some people, high-protein or high-fat meals may delay how quickly levodopa starts working. If you notice reduced effectiveness after eating, keep a log of your food and medication. Discuss with your doctor or dietitian whether taking levodopa 30 to 60 minutes before a meal or 1 to 2 hours after could improve results.

Do not cut back on protein or change medication timing on your own. Your body needs protein to protect muscle. Talk to your doctor or pharmacist before starting supplements, since some, can interfere with levodopa.

How do I find a nutrition expert near me?

Ask your Parkinson's care team for a referral to a dietitian or speech therapist with experience in Parkinson's.

You can also contact the Parkinson's Foundation Helpline at **1-800-4PD-INFO (1-800-473-4636)** or **Helpline@Parkinson.org**.



Tips for Eating Well

- **Start where you are.** Notice the healthy choices you already make and build on them. Small changes are easier to keep and build over time.
- **Add before you subtract.** Focus on adding nutritious foods instead of removing others. This keeps eating enjoyable.
- **Find what fits you.** Consider your tastes, budget and routine. A plan you enjoy is easier to follow.