



Nutrition & Brain Health in Parkinson's Disease

Supporting Cognitive Function, Energy, and Long-Term Brain Health Through Food

Nutrition plays a powerful—yet often overlooked—role in Parkinson's disease. What you eat can influence **brain health, cognition, inflammation, energy, gut health, and medication effectiveness**. While no diet cures Parkinson's, thoughtful nutrition supports the brain and body in living as well as possible with the disease.

Through the **Wisconsin Parkinson Association**, individuals are encouraged to view nutrition as **one of the most accessible tools** for supporting long-term health and quality of life.

Food is not treatment alone—but it is daily brain support.

Why Nutrition Matters for the Parkinson's Brain

Parkinson's disease affects multiple brain systems, including dopamine production, mitochondrial function, inflammation pathways, and the gut–brain connection. Nutrition influences all of these.

Nutrition can help:

- Support cognitive function and attention
 - Reduce inflammation
 - Maintain muscle strength and energy
 - Support gut health and regular bowel function
 - Improve medication absorption and consistency
 - Protect long-term brain health
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The Gut–Brain Connection in Parkinson’s

The gut and brain are closely linked through nerves, immune signaling, and the microbiome.

In Parkinson’s:

- Constipation is common
- Gut motility is slowed
- The microbiome may be altered

Nutrition that supports gut health often improves **non-motor symptoms**, medication response, and overall well-being.

Dietary Patterns That Support Brain Health

Mediterranean Diet

One of the most studied dietary patterns for brain health.

Key features include:

- Fruits and vegetables
- Whole grains
- Olive oil as the primary fat
- Fish and seafood
- Nuts and seeds
- Limited red meat and processed foods

Benefits may include reduced inflammation, improved cardiovascular health, and cognitive protection.

MIND Diet (Mediterranean–DASH Intervention for Neurodegenerative Delay)

A hybrid diet designed specifically to support brain health.

Emphasizes:

- Leafy greens

- Berries
- Whole grains
- Fish
- Olive oil
- Nuts

The MIND diet has been associated with **slower cognitive decline** in aging populations and is often recommended for individuals with Parkinson's concerned about cognition.

Anti-Inflammatory Eating

Inflammation plays a role in Parkinson's progression and symptom severity.

Anti-inflammatory nutrition focuses on:

- Colorful fruits and vegetables
- Healthy fats (olive oil, avocado, omega-3s)
- Herbs and spices (turmeric, ginger, cinnamon)
- Minimizing ultra-processed foods

Lower inflammation supports both brain and body resilience.

Protein & Levodopa: Finding the Right Balance

Protein is essential for:

- Muscle strength
- Balance
- Immune health
- Overall energy

However, protein can **interfere with levodopa absorption** in some individuals.

Helpful strategies may include:

- Avoiding protein 30–60 minutes before taking levodopa

- Waiting about 1 hour after levodopa before eating high-protein meals
- Shifting most protein intake to the evening if recommended
- Working with a dietitian to individualize timing

Protein is not the enemy—it just needs timing.

Key Nutrients for Brain Health

Omega-3 Fatty Acids

Found in:

- Fatty fish (salmon, sardines)
- Flaxseed
- Walnuts

Support brain cell health and reduce inflammation.

Antioxidants

Found in:

- Berries
- Dark leafy greens
- Colorful vegetables
- Green tea

Help protect brain cells from oxidative stress.

Fiber

Found in:

- Whole grains
- Beans and lentils
- Fruits and vegetables

Supports gut health and reduces constipation—one of the most common non-motor symptoms of Parkinson's.

Hydration

Dehydration worsens:

- Fatigue
- Constipation
- Low blood pressure
- Cognitive fog

Consistent fluid intake is essential for brain and autonomic health.

Practical Nutrition Tips for Daily Life

Helpful approaches include:

- Eating regular meals and snacks
- Choosing nutrient-dense foods
- Preparing simple, repeatable meals
- Using frozen vegetables when fresh foods are limited
- Planning meals around medication timing

Consistency matters more than perfection.

When to Seek Nutrition Support

Consider professional guidance if you experience:

- Unintentional weight loss
- Swallowing difficulties
- Constipation that does not improve
- Medication fluctuations related to meals

- Fatigue or low energy

A registered dietitian familiar with Parkinson's can help individualize a plan.

Nutrition, Cognition & Mood

Brain-supportive nutrition may help:

- Stabilize energy
- Support focus and attention
- Reduce mood fluctuations
- Improve sleep quality

Nutrition works best alongside exercise, medication optimization, sleep care, and social connection.

A Reassuring Perspective

There is no single “Parkinson’s diet.” What matters most is **sustainable, nourishing patterns** that support your body, brain, and daily life.

Food is one of the ways you care for your future self—one meal at a time.

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