



MS Learn Online Feature Presentation

Nutrition Featuring: Denise Nowack, RD

>>Tracey Kimball: Hi, I'm Tracey Kimball and welcome to MS Learn Online. Maintaining general good health is very important whether you have MS or any other chronic disorder. A well balanced and carefully planned diet will help to achieve this goal. MS specialists recommend that people with MS adhere to the same low-fat, high-fiber diet that's recommended for the general population.

Joining us to discuss MS and nutrition is Denise Nowack. Ms. Nowack is a registered dietician and is the executive vice president of Chapter Programs and Services for the Southern California and Nevada Chapter of the National MS Society. Thank you for joining us, Denise.

>>Denise Nowack: It's a pleasure being here, Tracey, thanks.

>> Tracey Kimball: Is there a special diet that is appropriate for people living with MS?

>>Denise Nowack: Tracey while there isn't a specific diet for MS, nutrition is a cornerstone for living well with MS and there are certain considerations that one might want to pay attention to for living well with MS.

>> Tracey Kimball: Let's talk about individual MS symptoms and things we can do in our diet that may make a difference, firstly, fatigue.

>>Denise Nowack: Fatigue is one of those symptoms that can truly sabotage the best intentions of good nutrition. If you were to think about how you eat when you're tired, you might find that you are skipping meals, you're just grabbing whatever

is at your fingertips, or you call out for food more often. And this is one area where nutrition plays a very important role. Foods are fuel, so if we're not getting what we need, we're not getting the fuel to feed our bodies. So, it's kind of a vicious circle.

I have four strategies that I recommend to people. Start your day and have a plan. When you get up in the morning, think about how you're going to spend your day, where you're going to spend your energy, and what you might want to eat at the end of the day, your dinner meal. That is usually where people lose track. Be a savvy snacker. Snacking is one of those things that might be the most beneficial for people with MS. It is easy to skip meals, so if we have smaller, more frequent meals throughout the day, then you keep your energy levels even.

Third point is I encourage people to keep a power pantry, and consider the power pantry your emergency food supply. It's about keeping your refrigerator, your freezer, and your cupboards stocked with foods that you can just pull out, either grab and eat, or make a quick and easy meal.

Finally, meal management could be kept simple, and using your power pantry you could put your best assets to work. Think about gathering your stuff first. You don't have to stand at the counter to cook your meals. Take it on a tray or a rolling cart to the table, put your meal together and pop it in the oven.

Think about maybe cooking once, eating twice. Make a bigger meal and extend that throughout the week into perhaps a salad or a side dish. Or, better yet, you can freeze your entrees in ready-to-serve casserole dishes. And then you can take them out, pop them in the oven later.

>> **Tracey Kimball:** How about bladder issues? I have a challenge I have to go all of the time it seems.

>> **Denise Nowack:** Well, with bladder issues, what we see are people oftentimes trying to control their output by limiting their intake, and fluid restrictions can really be problematic for folks. It can cause dry mouth, problems swallowing, and actually create urinary infections later on down the line. So, we want to make sure we don't skip fluids. Easy way to fit fluids in is think about taking full glasses of fluids every time you take your medication.

When you choose fluids, you probably want to limit alcohol and caffeine, however, because these act as diuretics. Some people are concerned about drinking fluids throughout the day, especially if they're out and about. And you can space your fluids accordingly. If you know you're going out and traveling in the car and you know you

won't be at a place where you can visit the restroom, you might want to limit it at that point in time and pick up your fluids later in the day.

>> **Tracey Kimball:** And then how about bowel issues?

>>**Denise Nowack:** Constipation can be common in people with multiple sclerosis, as with all of us, and three things come into play here: it's fiber, fluids and fitness. These are all important to keep things moving. Fiber kind of acts as a broom to push things through our bowel, and fluids are important because it gives the fiber bulk so that it can actually move smoothly. Fitness, as it keeps all of us moving, keeps our intestinal tract moving as well.

>> **Tracey Kimball:** Loss of mobility is an issue for some people with MS. Talk to us, please, about that in relation to diet and exercise.

>>**Denise Nowack:** Exercise is important from a lot of different perspectives, and it's important as best we can, you just keep moving. From a diet perspective, though, exercise plays an important role in weight management. So, if you think about it, the food we eat, we have to spend those calories, otherwise we store it as fat, and those five extra pounds can really play a key role in managing fatigue. Exercise is also important in helping to manage fatigue as well. So, it plays a very critical role in giving you energy once you build your endurance.

And, finally, as people stop moving and aren't able to weight-bear, osteoporosis can become a problem, and that's a thinning of the bones. And from a diet perspective, calcium and vitamin D play a very important role in maintaining good bone health.

>> **Tracey Kimball:** Alright, let's talk about Vitamin D. Should people living with MS take more vitamin D?

>>**Denise Nowack:** Vitamin D is one of the hot new nutrients, and I think we're just seeing more and more information about vitamin D, not just for MS, but for other health conditions as well.

As far as MS goes, research does show that vitamin D may be helpful in preventing MS. Vitamin D is the sunshine vitamin, and it seems like the further away we get from the equator the greater the prevalence of MS. And we believe that might be due to sun exposure to the skin in the production of vitamin D.

Vitamin D may also play an important role in the progression of MS, and this is where research still is taking us. This is one area we want to keep our eyes on for certain.

As far as daily intake for vitamin D, 2000 IU (International Unites) is generally recognized as safe. It isn't recommended, though, that anybody take more than that without having a test of blood levels of vitamin D first. If you want to talk to your physician about that, it's a very simple test, and then if additional vitamin D is necessary, they can prescribe it and follow your course.

>> **Tracey Kimball:** Are there any other supplements that might be beneficial for people with MS?

>>**Denise Nowack:** Calcium is a very important nutrient in the diet for people with MS, and quite often enough isn't found in their diet. We need 1200 mg of calcium a day, so it's very safe to take from a supplemental standpoint, either calcium citrate or calcium carbonate. If you do take a supplement, though, split the doses. Take 500 mg perhaps in the morning and 500 at another time during the day.

Another nutrient that might be good to take from a supplemental standpoint is omega-3. Omega-3 fatty acids play a very important role in the production of myelin, and they are mildly anti-inflammatory as well. We can get omega-3 fatty acids from deepwater fish in our diet. And if fish isn't a favorite of yours, you can also find omega-3s in walnuts and flaxseeds and flaxseed oil, though they are not as potent as the fish form of omega-3s. Additionally, you can take a supplement. One thousand IU of omega-3 is safe to take.

And when the diet doesn't fill the bill, a multivitamin supplement really can be beneficial for someone with MS. If you are taking supplements, I do recommend that you do share that information with your physician so they can take that into account with all the other medications you may be taking as well.

>>**Tracey Kimball:** Denise that was very helpful, thank you very much. If you would like to get more information on nutrition and MS go to nationalsociety.org. This is Tracey Kimball for MS Learn Online. Thanks for watching!