

In Touch Newsletter

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How to choose the best nutrient-rich foods for Parkinson's

Why is nutrient-rich food important to people living with Parkinson's?

Because no matter how perfect your medication regime, no matter how much, how often, and how hard you exercise, you need nourishing food for good health.

With Parkinson's, nutrition takes on an additional role in supporting the brain and nervous system, as well as the body. So let's take a look at the foods that fortify the brain and the body.

Thumbs up:

Plant foods

Whole grains, fresh vegetables and fruits, legumes. These provide complex carbohydrates, vitamins and minerals, antioxidants, and fibres.

Whole barley, rye, and oats have all been found to improve aspects of our health, such as improved colon health, regular bowel movements, control of blood glucose and cholesterol, and strengthening the immune system.

Blueberries may help prevent or slow neurodegeneration and appear to boost memory. Apples and onions contain quercetin, a flavonoid and antioxidant, which may help protect against damage to DNA.

Legumes and dry beans, split peas, lentils, chickpeas are rich in protein, fibres, and the B vitamins that are so important in Parkinson's.

Animal foods

Fish and seafood, meat, poultry, eggs, and dairy foods all contain vitamin B12, which isn't found in plant-based foods. They also contain all nine essential amino acids.

Fatty fish and seafood, and to a lesser extent, eggs, also have omega-3 fatty acids and vitamin D. These are especially important in Parkinson's as the grey matter of the brain is largely made up of omega-3 fats, and deficiency is associated with dementia and depression. Omega-3 fats also support heart health.

Fatty fish and eggs are among the few foods that naturally contain vitamin D. This includes the more powerful form called 25-hydroxyvitamin D, which is not found in supplements or fortified milk.

Deficiency is associated with loss of muscle mass and bone density, falls, fractures, some cancers, irritable bowel syndrome, and cognitive decline.

Note: Some people are very sensitive to the milk of cows, sheep, and goats. These contain an especially high ratio of the amino acids that compete with levodopa for absorption. If milk blocks levodopa absorption, choose a milk alternative such as almond, soy, or rice milk.

Prebiotic and probiotic foods

Probiotic foods contain the living organisms such as friendly bacteria and yeasts that make up the microbiome. These are especially important for those with Parkinson's.

Research is increasingly finding a relationship between the brain, the gut, and the colony of cells in the gut called the microbiome. It appears that the microbiome may influence the onset and progression of Parkinson's. Some speculate that Parkinson's actually begins in the gut, due to poor gut health¹.

Prebiotic foods contain fibres that humans can't digest, but that serve as food and fuel for the probiotic organisms.

Note: If you are using the drug rasagiline you should not eat aged and fermented foods, as they have high levels of tyramine. Such foods can cause hypertensive crisis.

Yoghurt can be a good choice, as it's safe for those using rasagiline. The more different strains of organisms it has, the better – look on the label to see which organisms it contains.

Kefir is a fermented drink that may be made with milk, water, or coconut milk. It has more different strains of probiotic bacteria than yoghurt. If you are sensitive to milk protein, try water kefir or coconut milk kefir.

Fermented pickles are made by immersing vegetables in a salt and water brine solution. They are not the same as pickles made with vinegar, which do not have probiotic properties. Fermented pickles must not be canned or heat-treated; heat will destroy the live organisms.

Sauerkraut is fermented cabbage and is a good source of probiotic bacteria. Kimchi is a Korean version and is spicier. Both must be unpasteurised, as heat will kill the organisms.

Miso is fermented soybean paste.

Prebiotic foods

Whole wheat, oats, onions, leeks, garlic, asparagus, Jerusalem artichokes, lettuce, eggplant, sweet potatoes, bananas, tomatoes, cashews, peanuts, and legumes

(dried beans, peas, lentils). Each of these foods has different types of indigestible fibres, known as prebiotics. Also high-quality dark chocolate is a prebiotic food.

Prebiotics are used as food by the colony of friendly bacteria in our gut. Each prebiotic food supports different kinds of friendly bacteria so, if possible, eat a variety of these foods.

One study found that subjects eating whole grains had an increase in one kind of the friendly gut bacteria, and a decrease in harmful bacteria. An animal study discovered that prebiotic foods improved sleep. So don't skimp on fibre; keep those good microbes well-fed.

Thumbs down:

Refined and highly-processed foods

Refined ingredients like white flour and refined sugar have been stripped of their nutrients and prebiotic fibres. Highly-processed foods, such as many canned soups, boxed macaroni and cheese, and frozen ready-to-eat meals contain refined ingredients and also have potentially harmful additives, such as emulsifiers, thickeners, artificial dyes, and preservatives.

Food ingredients that have been sprayed with pesticides and herbicides

We've long seen an association between agricultural use of herbicides, and increased incidence of Parkinson's among farming communities. Now research is beginning to uncover possible causes.

Some degenerative diseases appear linked to glyphosate, a common herbicide. Animal studies show that it may interfere with the normal working of the gut, which eventually damages motor neurons².

Source

Kathrynne Holden, former National Parkinson Foundation dietician (UK)

Visit her website, nutritionucanlivewith.com, for more Parkinson's-related nutrition information

References

1. 'Brain-gut-microbiota axis in Parkinson's disease', Mulak A, Bonaz B. World J Gastroenterol. 2015 Oct 7; 21(37).
2. 'Does glyphosate acting as a glycine analogue contribute to ALS?' (2017) J Bioinfo Proteomics Rev 3(1): 1- 21. Seneff S, Morley WA, Hadden MJ, Michener MC.

Actively Ageing & Lifestyle Expo held in Temora

Temora Parkinson's Support Group participated in the town's Actively Ageing & Lifestyle Expo with an information stall in February.

There were approximately 30 stalls at the event – all sharing information aimed at helping ageing people remain active and safe.

The Parkinson's stall featured information packs which included resource pamphlets and information about the Support Group's meetings.

The Support Group also offered hand-made cards for sale. They were created by one of the Group participants who began making cards after being diagnosed with Parkinson's. She generously donates \$1 to Parkinson's research from every card sold.

Meet our Team Member

Zenon Culbert
Support Coordinator

Zenon Culbert joined Parkinson's NSW as an NDIS Support Coordinator early in 2023. His role is to connect NDIS clients who have been allocated a support package with the services they require.

Zenon worked as a disability support worker during his university years.

In addition to this experience, he describes himself as being quite community-minded. He was drawn to politics shortly after university – even going as far as standing for Labor pre-selection during an election campaign.

Zenon is also very entrepreneurial, having run his own signage company for seven years. This taught him the value of relationships with his customers and delivering excellent service.

"I'm used to dealing with the public and – as a former support worker and provider of services – I can convert those diverse experiences to help NDIS clients identify and fund the services they require," Zenon said.

Zenon swims and surfs to escape day-to-day stresses, as well as using yoga and meditation to relax. Family is also important to him.

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Meet our Team Member

Robyn McKern
NDIS Advocate

Robyn McKern joined Parkinson's NSW as an NDIS Advocate early in 2023.

The role of an Advocate is to help Parkinson's NSW clients navigate the often complex processes required to obtain financial support from the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

Robyn came to us from Dementia Australia where she was on the National Intake Team for more than five years. Prior to that she was with the Asthma Foundation for many years, culminating in a role as Health Professional Liaison.

"I joined Parkinson's NSW because I like organisations that work for a purpose, and this role enables me to make a real difference in people's lives by helping them gain access to services," she said.

When she is not working, Robyn likes travel, reading and remaining physically active.

Martin Pryor and the tales of his dog, Bungee

Writing a children's book about a dog named Bungee – in fact, a series of books about this dog – was never on Martin Pryor's to-do list.

"It was an accident," laughs Martin, 68, who is living with Parkinson's and has so far released *Bungee*, *A Doggy Tale*, and *Bungee's Buddies*.

"I was just sitting down taking a rest from writing music and in walked our dog. Instead of going on with the song, I wrote a few lines of poetry about him. It became a book and then a second, and a third, and now there are eight in the series I've written, with the first two released.

"Bungee is our dog, and he was a rescue dog. The books follow his life and adventures and are written to make reading enjoyable for primary school children. Once the publishing costs are covered a percentage of the profits will go to Parkinson's NSW. It's the least I can do to thank them for all they do for people living with Parkinson's."

Martin, who lives with his wife in North Balgowlah, released a CD in 2017 called *Hot Sand*, which raised \$1500 for Parkinson's NSW. He had played guitar in bands as a young man but had a variety of careers until his retirement in 2016.

“Originally I was an art teacher,” Martin explains. “And then for many years I was a professional sailor, sailing around the world. Then I was a history teacher for 20 years and from 2011 I transferred from history to directing a sailing program at the school where I had taught.”

By 2013, Martin was also a keen cyclist, very fit and slim, when he fell down some stairs.

“It took me ten weeks to recuperate,” he recalls. “I had problems with my left knee and other things. I could ride again, but it just didn’t feel right. I couldn’t get the power I used to have. In 2016 when I had issues with my back, I went to see a physiotherapist I’d known a long time.

“She asked me to put my arms across my chest and I noticed my wrist shake and wondered what that was about. I had no idea, but I could see the look on her face. She asked me to see a neurologist. When I was diagnosed with Parkinson’s, I said thank heavens for that. It was a relief because I thought it was something much worse.”

Following his diagnosis, Martin retired, and it was when he was tidying his study at home that he found his old guitar.

“The words to Parkinson’s Blues just came into my head,” he says. “I’d been in bands from rock to jazz, in choirs, but I hadn’t touched a guitar for 37 years. Now I’ve done three albums, with the fourth to come.”

Since writing his first children’s book two years ago, Martin and his family have been working on promoting the books.

“It was fun to write the books and as a teacher I have a good understanding of what helps children to read,” says Martin. “I also have lifelong friends who are primary school teachers. I knew what I wanted for the illustrations and supplied the artist with lots of photos of the dogs I was writing about as well as a description of how I wanted them used. I’m very happy with the illustrations.

“We plan to sell books at book fairs and the Manly markets; my son’s girlfriend promotes them on an Instagram account, and I do school visits and email broadcasts.

Just recently I’ve signed with a book outlet in Britain called Featherbed Tales (<https://featherbedtales.com/>). My book is their first outside author on their website.

This site allows people to record themselves reading the books there so that their child or grandchild can log in and hear the book being read to them as they follow the pages, which is great for families who can’t see each other easily.”

If you'd like to buy copies of Martin's books, you can purchase them on Amazon, Barnes & Noble, Xlibris and Booktopia. Martin also has a number of personally signed books available through Thebungeebooks@gmail.com