



# Diet and Parkinson's

Having a healthy diet can help you manage some of your Parkinson's symptoms and support your overall health. There isn't a specific diet that can treat Parkinson's disease or reverse it, but some changes to what and how you eat may help improve your symptoms. Learn more about healthy eating habits, if there are any foods you should avoid, and how to deal with common diet-related complications of Parkinson's, such as constipation.

While there are ongoing studies looking at the effects of diet on Parkinson's symptoms and Parkinson's medication, there is no one therapeutic diet that is universally accepted as the 'right way' to eat with Parkinson's disease. What is universally accepted and recommended, however, is that getting proper nutrition from a healthy diet is essential to your wellbeing.

A healthy diet may look different for different people depending on different factors such as where they live, their cultural upbringing, religious beliefs, and our financial status. Not all the choices listed here will be available to everyone, what is important is to do the best that you can with the options available to you.

Lastly, it is important to remember that changing lifestyle habits (like starting a new diet) can often be a lengthy process with ups and downs; you can expect it to take some time.



## **Table of Content**

Which foods can help with Parkinson's disease?.....	2
Are there foods I should avoid with Parkinson's disease? .....	3
What should you do if Parkinson's disease makes it difficult to eat? .....	4
How can I prevent constipation with Parkinson's disease? .....	5

## Which foods can help with Parkinson's disease?

There isn't a special diet recommended for people with Parkinson's disease. The most important thing is to have a varied, balanced and healthy diet with regular meals, including:

- ★ fresh fruit and vegetables
- ★ high-fibre starchy foods such as wholegrain, bread, yams and cornmeal
- ★ healthy proteins, such as lean meat, beans, peas, seeds, and nuts
- ★ healthier unsaturated fats such as olive or sunflower, rather than saturated animal fats
- ★ plenty of fluid

Following a balanced diet has lots of benefits, such as helping you maintain a healthy weight, supporting your heart health and [mood](#), and helping you poo regularly.

There is some research to show that dietary changes can help with certain [symptoms of Parkinson's disease](#). For example, because people with Parkinson's are susceptible to low bone density, it's important that you get



plenty of calcium and vitamin D in your diet. These nutrients work together to help build healthy bones.

Calcium-rich foods include green leafy vegetables and fish where you eat the bones (such as sardines). Your body gets most of the vitamin D it needs from sunlight but it's also in some foods, such as egg yolks and meat.

Increasing your protein intake, alongside [regular exercise](#) can also help slow down sarcopenia, the loss of muscle mass due to ageing.

This process happens to everyone, not just people with Parkinson's disease. But there's evidence to show that staying active while increasing the amount of healthy protein foods you eat may help.

But the most important thing is to eat a healthy diet overall. You should always talk to your doctor before changing your diet and about any eating concerns you may have.

## Are there foods I should avoid with Parkinson's disease?

Eating a healthy, balanced diet is the key thing you can do. But making some simple changes can help you deal with specific complications of Parkinson's.

For example, people with Parkinson's disease can experience a form of low blood pressure called orthostatic or postural hypotension. You can help manage it by cutting down on refined carbohydrates, particularly sugary food and alcohol. Increasing your fluid intake and eating smaller, more frequent meals can also help. But always speak to your doctor about how to manage your symptoms.



If you've been prescribed levodopa to manage your symptoms, eating protein-rich foods like meat, fish, nuts and beans may interfere with your body's absorption of the drug. This can make it work more slowly or not as well as usual.

Get advice from your healthcare professional on timing when you take levodopa and when you eat meals. For example, you could wait an hour before and an hour after a protein-rich meal.

People with Parkinson's commonly experience sleep problems. Alongside other changes to your lifestyle, you may want to consider limiting the amount of sugar, alcohol, and caffeine you consume before bedtime as these can disrupt your sleep. You may also want to consider avoiding fatty and spicy foods as it is harder to digest for some people.

## What should you do if Parkinson's disease makes it difficult to eat?

Parkinson's can lead to complications that make it difficult to eat. For example, problems with chewing or swallowing. Tremors may make it hard to cut up food or bring it up to your mouth. And certain medications can trigger nausea (sickness) and affect your appetite.

If you're struggling to eat enough, simple changes can help. For example, adapted eating and drinking aids may help make mealtimes easier if you have weakness or tremors.

If you have swallowing problems, it can help to eat smaller, more frequent meals and take small mouthfuls. It may help to maintain a good posture and try to sit upright while tilting your head forward and tucking in your chin when



swallowing as this opens up the oesophagus (food pipe) rather than the trachea (windpipe) so prevents inhaling food.. You could also think about having more of a liquid-based diet, as that can help with swallowing.

But if you're experiencing ongoing eating problems or you're losing weight always speak to your doctor to get tailored advice.

## How can I prevent constipation with Parkinson's disease?

Constipation is a common problem for people with Parkinson's disease. This is because Parkinson's affects your digestive system, and it's also a side-effect of some Parkinson's medications. Try these eating and drinking tips for reducing constipation with Parkinson's disease:

- ★ **Eat a fibre-rich diet**, including fruit and vegetables, beans and pulses.
- ★ **Drink more water** and eat foods that have a high-water content such as fruit, including melons and oranges.
- ★ **Avoid alcohol**, which can dehydrate your body.
- ★ **Try to [exercise more](#)**, as it can help stimulate your bowels.

Using stool softeners or laxatives can help ease bowel movements, but they are not suitable for everyone and should only be used for a short time. Speak to your doctor if you have trouble passing stool – they can give you more information and advice.

### Sources (all accessed May 2022)

- Agarwal et al 2018: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/30498828/>



- American Parkinson Disease Association. What we know about avoiding particular foods & supplements for Parkinson's: <https://www.apdaparkinson.org/article/nutrition-and-parkinsons-disease-part-one/>
- BDA 2019: <https://www.bda.uk.com/resource/vitamin-d.html>
- Brazier et al, 2021. The role of nutrition in the treatment of sarcopenia in Parkinson's disease: a scoping review. Proceedings of the Nutrition Society. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/proceedings-of-the-nutrition-society/article/role-of-nutrition-in-the-treatment-of-sarcopenia-in-parkinsons-disease-a-scoping-review/02C0E4E4ADDD8219797A532191698A32>
- Chelimsky & Chelimsky. Non-pharmacologic management of orthostatic hypotension. Auton Neurosci. 2020 Dec;229:102732. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/33126146/>
- Christensen et al. Use of ketogenic diets in the treatment of central nervous system diseases: a systematic review. Nord J Psychiatry. 2021 Jan;75(1):1-8. doi: 10.1080/08039488.2020.1795924. Epub 2020 Aug 6.
- Colditz et al 2019: <https://www.uptodate.com/contents/healthy-diet-in-adults>
- Fleisher et al 2020: <https://www.uptodate.com/contents/parkinson-disease-treatment-options-education-support-and-therapy-beyond-the-basics>
- Fleisher et al 2021: <https://www.uptodate.com/contents/nonpharmacologic-management-of-parkinson-disease>
- Grosset nd: <https://www.parkinsons.org.uk/information-and-support/your-magazine/experts/bone-health-and-parkinsons>
- McManamon R nd: Getting to know a dietician. Parkinson's UK. <https://www.parkinsons.org.uk/information-and-support/your-magazine/experts/getting-knowa-dietitian>
- Mills et al. Nonpharmacologic management of orthostatic hypotension: a systematic review. Arch Phys Med Rehabil. 2015 Feb;96(2):366-375.e6. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/25449193/>
- Mischley 2017: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/28805567/>
- Naseeb et al, 2017. Nutrition Research. Protein and exercise in the prevention of sarcopenia and aging. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nutres.2017.01.001>
- Parkinson's Foundation <https://www.parkinson.org/pd-library/fact-sheets/Nutrition>
- Parkinson's Foundation <https://www.parkinson.org/Living-with-Parkinsons/Managing-Parkinsons/Diet-and-Nutrition>
- Parkinson's UK 2021: [https://www.parkinsons.org.uk/sites/default/files/2021-07/INFOB0007\\_Diet%20and%20Parkinson%27s\\_WEB.pdf](https://www.parkinsons.org.uk/sites/default/files/2021-07/INFOB0007_Diet%20and%20Parkinson%27s_WEB.pdf)
- Pavón et al. Ketogenic diet and cognition in neurological diseases: a systematic review. Nutrition Reviews, Volume 79, Issue 7, July 2021, Pages 802-813, <https://doi.org/10.1093/nutrit/nuaa113>
- Rojo-Sebastián et al. Vitamin B6 Deficiency in Patients With Parkinson Disease Treated With Levodopa/Carbidopa. Clinical neuropharmacology: 9/10 2020 - Volume 43 - Issue 5 - p 151-157
- Shen. Associations between B Vitamins and Parkinson's Disease Nutrients. 2015 Aug 27;7(9):7197-208. doi: 10.3390/nu7095333.
- doi: 10.1097/WNF.0000000000000408



- Wald 2020: <https://www.uptodate.com/contents/constipation-in-adults-beyond-the-basics>

## **Disclaimer**

This article has been put together for informational and educational purposes only. It should not be interpreted to be a diagnosis, treatment or any other type of health care advice. The reader should seek their own medical or professional advice and must not rely on the information contained in this article as an alternative to medical advice from their doctors or other professional healthcare providers. Parkinson's Africa disclaims any responsibility and liability of any kind in connection with the reader's use of the information.