

Meeting minutes from Chapel Hill PD Support Group 1/3/17

Discussion on nutrition & PD, by dietician Amanda Holliday

- There is currently no specific diet for people with Parkinson's
- With aging in general, we typically don't need as many calories as young people, which means that every bite we do take is more "precious" and counts even more
- Do not skip meals. Keep a regular eating schedule. Try to eat each meal equally (aka approximately the same amount of food and the same balance of protein to veggies/fruits to carbs).
- Strive for 5 servings of fruits and/or vegetables per day
- For most medication (Parkinson's or otherwise), in general it is good to eat a light snack with or before the medications to avoid upsetting your stomach (of course this varies depending on your medications – consult with your doctor)
- The deal with protein and Carbidopa/Levodopa:
 - It is a common misconception that if you are taking Sinemet (Carbidopa/Levodopa) for Parkinson's, you should avoid protein entirely.
 - Sinemet can take a long time to be absorbed through the stomach. High fat meals also take a long time to be digested, so if you eat something fatty with your Sinemet, it can further delay clearing in the stomach.
 - Similarly, protein must be broken down in the intestine and can take a while to get into the blood and through to the brain. Sinemet must also transit the intestine and blood-brain barrier using the same "carrier system" as the broken down protein (aka amino acids). Therefore for a meal with a large amount of protein, the Sinemet and the protein sort of compete for the same "carriers" which can interfere with Sinemet absorption.
 - If you eat protein and then take Sinemet but you don't feel like your medication "kicks in," it could be related to this aforementioned protein absorption.
 - In general, try to avoid eating a *large* amount of protein *before* taking Sinemet.
 - Take Sinemet along with a small amount of food that doesn't contain a lot of protein (especially if you experience nausea when taking Sinemet on an empty stomach), such as a few crackers, fruit, ginger tea, or a piece of toast... Wait 30-60 minutes, and then eat a larger meal that contains protein.
 - It is important to have a balanced protein diet and to evenly divide it throughout the day (typically about 25-30 grams of protein per meal), but you can space protein intake around your PD medication schedule.
 - ...Discuss protein and Sinemet with your Movement Disorders Specialist!
- Not all fats are bad.
 - There is no good (nutritional value) that comes out of trans fat.
 - Nuts, avocado, coconut, cheese (in smaller amounts), eggs, olive oil and fish are examples of good/healthy fats.
- We crave sweets more as we age.
 - Be mindful of this so that you don't overdo it on sugar.
 - Try to minimize non-natural sugars, such as added sugar. Fruits have good natural sugar.
- With Parkinson's, because you lose sense of smell you can also lose some sense of taste. As a result, some people with PD may over salt their food to try to enhance the flavor.

- Taste your food first before salting. Pour the salt in your hand before taking a pinch and adding it to your food (this is what professional chefs do!), as opposed to just salting your food directly from the salt container, as this allows you to better control the salt you're adding to your food.
- Other flavor enhancers: Herbs, spices, vinegar, citrus, molasses, sorghum
- MSG has a bad reputation because of the high sodium content and some people report not feeling well after consuming it. BUT, dieticians often recommend it for people who otherwise have no appetite and are not eating.
- Exercise will help you maximize your PD meds because it naturally produces dopamine. So you need regular exercise in addition to a healthy, balanced diet.
- It is important to have a balance of good gut flora (probiotics) – Yogurts (especially those with active cultures) and fermented foods like kimchee and sauerkraut can help with this.
- The effects of vitamin E is still not clear so most dieticians are not currently recommending it
- Some people believe in “liberalizing” seniors, as in “as we age we may as well enjoy life by eating whatever we want!” But Amanda feels that you must balance quality of life/enjoyment with a healthy diet and feels that if you only eat sugar, salt, and fat, you're not going to feel well anyway.
 - She makes an exception for people with advanced dementia and people who are close to death
- Constipation is very common with Parkinson's
 - We must balance soluble fiber (e.g., the inside of an apple) and insoluble fiber (e.g., apple peel)
 - These may help with constipation: Beans, hot liquids, prunes, dark leafy greens, and fluids (not soda or sweet tea though!)
- Spread out 8 cups of water/day over the course of the day
- Seafood is good protein and health fat, but only if you prepare it in a healthy way (aka not breading and deep frying it)
- Amanda is not sure if she believes in being “gluten-free” unless you cannot process or are allergic to gluten
 - There are more allergies to grains in the US, most likely related to GMOs, breastfeeding rates and our increased reliance on processed foods... so our gut flora is different than it used to be
 - In general for most of us, don't eat too much gluten but you don't need to avoid it either
- For people with severe dementia, it is important to not just put food in front of them and then walk away as it can be overwhelming and it's hard for them to remember what to do
- Keep in mind that most vitamins and supplements are not regulated by the FDA
- Orgain is a good option for protein drinks if you don't like Boost – it is organic and has less added and artificial sugar

Resources on nutrition:

- “Nutrition Matters” booklet on Parkinson’s
 - PDF version: www.parkinson.org/sites/default/files/Nutrition_Matters.pdf
 - If you want a free hard copy mailed to you, email helpline@parkinson.org or call 1-800-473-4636
- Website specifically on PD and nutrition: www.nutritionucanlivewith.com
- More information:
 - www.pdf.org/en/winter06_07_nutrition_and_parkinson
 - www.michaeljfox.org/understanding-parkinsons/living-with-pd/topic.php?nutrition
 - Archived webinar: www.pdf.org/en/parkinson_briefing_nutrition15
- www.eatright.org/find-an-expert: Find nutritionist near you. But keep in mind it is very rare to find a nutritionist who specializes in working with aging, let alone Parkinson’s.
- Blog on senior nutrition that Amanda Holliday used to maintain, that she said will start to be updated again soon: <https://3squaremealsblog.wordpress.com/>
- Amanda Holliday is not currently taking clients as she works as a full-time professor at UNC, but is available to answer a few questions by email (let me know if you want her email address) and may be able to see clients in the summer.