Multiple Sclerosis & Nutrition

Multiple sclerosis (often abbreviated to MS) is a chronic inflammatory disease in which the fatty myelin sheaths around the brain and spinal cord are damaged, leading to scarring as well as a broad spectrum of signs and symptoms. The disorder onset typically occurs in young adults and typically in more women than men.

MS affects the ability of the nerve cells in the brain and spinal cord to communicate with each other; the damage to the myelin sheaths slows down or blocks messages between the brain and body. The body's own immune system attacks and damages the myelin.

Although the mechanisms of MS have been thoroughly studied, the cause of this disorder still remains unknown. Theories suggest that MS could be brought on by genetics, infections or different environmental stressors like pollution or excessive antibiotic use. MS takes several forms, with new symptoms occurring either in discrete attacks (relapsing forms) or slowly accumulating over time (progressive forms). Between attacks, symptoms may go away completely, but permanent neurological problems often occur, especially as the disorder advances.

There is no known cure for MS. The goal of treatment is to return to normal function after an attack, prevent future attacks and prevent disability. Some patients report that MS medications are poorly tolerated, and these people often turn to alternative, holistic methods of treatment through nutrition and lifestyle. As with any disorder or disease, nutrition is a key component in managing symptoms and can lead to a better quality of life.

Magnesium

Some studies suggest that patients with MS could be deficient in magnesium. Magnesium can be found in pumpkin seeds, salmon, beans, halibut and spinach. Signs of magnesium deficiency are similar to those of MS, including muscle spasms, weakness and twitching. Magnesium deficiency can also be caused by a diet high in grains, such as wheat. Wheat contains phytic acid, which binds magnesium and makes it unavailable to the body. Wheat does not grow in tropical countries therefore it is not a staple food in those countries; interestingly, MS is not common in tropical countries.

Gluten Intolerance

Gluten intolerance has also been implicated in MS, and MS has been shown to occur more frequently in countries with diets higher in gluten. Sources of gluten include wheat, bread, pasta, tortillas and most baked goods. Gluten intolerance can lower absorption of nutrients, including magnesium. MS is uncommon in countries like China and Japan, where the main starch is rice, which does not contain gluten.

Copyright 2011 - Service Foods, Inc.

Vitamin D Deficiency and Omega-3 Fatty Acids

Studies of animals affected by MS have found that the animals have vitamin D deficiencies, and additional data shows that many people with MS also have low vitamin D levels. The sun is major source of vitamin D, and MS is less common is areas with plentiful sunlight exposure.

MS also occurs less frequently in areas where fish is commonly consumed. Fish oils provide another major natural source of vitamin D, as well as omega-3 fatty acids. Studies focusing on omega-3 fatty acids have proven that they provide numerous benefits in helping to treat MS.

Vitamin B-12 and Vitamin K Deficiencies

Deficiencies in vitamin B-12 and vitamin are also common in those who suffer from MS. Malabsorption of vitamins and minerals can occur for many reasons, one of which is a lack of helpful intestinal bacteria to help digest and break down foods. A lack of healthy bacteria in MS patients can be a result of the overuse of antibiotics, which can destroy beneficial bacteria like the microflora that are needed to synthesize vitamin K.

Science has shown many different nutrients, such as vitamin D and essential fatty acids, are needed for myelin sheath health and production. Studies have proven that many people who suffer from MS are also deficient in several nutrients and beneficial intestinal flora. This logically explains the symptoms of MS and highlights the importance of a well-balanced diet rich in nutrients. A diet low in saturated fats, high in fiber from non-gluten sources and rich in omega-3 fatty acids is recommended for those who are treating MS.

Along with diet, exercise can ease the symptoms of MS; however, certain precautions must be made. People affected by MS should not overdo any exercise; the phrase "no pain, no gain" certainly doesn't apply and this mentality is actually counterproductive to MS sufferers. A physical therapist or doctor can recommend an appropriate workout program that will meet the individual needs of patients with MS.

Supplementation

Several supplements have been shown to help alleviate the symptoms of MS and the side effects of the MS medications. The supplement list below is recommended in addition to a balanced healthy diet. Make sure they are manufactured by a company with NPA's certification for good manufacturing practices. Additional supplements may be recommended by your doctor.

- Magnesium
- Vitamin D
- Omega 3 fatty acids
- Vitamin B-12

Copyright 2011 - Service Foods, Inc.