



National
Multiple Sclerosis
Society

**MS Learn Online
Feature Presentation
Healthy Living: Nutrition
Patricia Kennedy, RN, CNP, MSCN**

Tracey>> I'm Tracey Kimball

Tom>> and I'm Tom Kimball, welcome to MS Learn Online. Taking care of our overall health and wellness is something we can all do.

Tracey>> Yes, even when living with a chronic illness. In this two-part series on healthy living, correspondent Rick Sommers talks with MS Nurse Pat Kennedy. In this first program, she focuses on nutrition.

Tom>> Yes, you know, if you've always wondered if there's a special diet that you should be on to help with your MS. Let's find out.

>>Patricia Kennedy: There is no special diet for MS in a sense of eat this, don't eat that. There are recommendations, however, that people eat a low saturated fat diet and focus more on the polyunsaturated fats in their diet.

We do recommend that people eat a well-balanced diet, something akin to what the Heart Association diet is, and we recommend highly, from an energy perspective, that they eat meals throughout the day, they not skip meals. Some people prefer to eat three, some people eat six, but just to keep the nutrition coming, because it does help in people who have a tendency to be quite fatigued to have that nutrition coming in is exceedingly helpful in treating that fatigue.

>> **Rick Sommers:** People typically, when they want to lose weight they skip meals because they think that's how they're going to lose the weight. And if you have MS and you're dealing with fatigue issues, that's a double no-no.

>>**Patricia Kennedy:** It is a double no-no, and it should be a no-no, actually, for everyone.

>> **Rick Sommers:** Right.

>>**Patricia Kennedy:** Yes.

>> **Rick Sommers:** How about grains and, I guess it's -- the Heart Association talks about eating whole grains, lots of vegetables, lots of roughage, and things like that.

>>**Patricia Kennedy:** Well, we certainly believe in having patients do that. It's good for them in any number of ways, some of them having to do with MS symptoms. Having the grains and the roughage and the high fiber content is very helpful for somebody with MS and the tendency toward constipation, for instance. But as far as anything else different, we recommend pretty much what's on the pyramid, paying most attention to what's on the bottom of the pyramid and allowing things at the top of the pyramid, such as sweets and fats, but only in small amounts and less often.

There are no absolute no-nos with MS, but there are no-nos as far as people's allergies, perhaps. People who have colon problems and aren't able to tolerate foods. They definitely should stay away from whatever the trigger is for them.

But many patients will read books about, well, when you have MS you should never eat this, you should always eat that. And quite honestly, without the evidence behind that, I have a hard time supporting that. Because we need that full nutrition to make our bodies whole.

>> **Rick Sommers:** So, basically, it's really common sense.

>>**Patricia Kennedy:** I think, yes, it is common sense, and I do think that however people want to eat, just to make good choices. We do make some recommendations for people.

>> **Rick Sommers:** Let's hear what those are.

>>**Patricia Kennedy:** There is some evidence, although it's never been strongly positive in studies, that the polyunsaturated fatty acids, omega-3s, omega-6s, may have some benefit for people with MS.

And so if a person were to make any dietary changes or additions, we might steer them in that direction. This isn't something that is highly positive and that everyone should do, but some people are just feeling like they want to do something. It helps them with, "Oh, I feel like I have some control here with my diet." That's something that we can recommend, and that as well as eating more frequently throughout the day, we feel that may be beneficial.

>> **Rick Sommers:** Are you a big fan of proteins in supplements and things like that?

>>**Patricia Kennedy:** No. Protein in the amounts that a person would eat on a regular basis, nothing in excess. And as far as supplements are concerned, just the omega-3 fatty acids could be recommended if a person wished to do that. The omega-6s, people tend to get a lot of that in their daily diet anyway. That's in your salad oils and the foods that you might ordinarily eat. As far as taking large supplements in addition that, there just is no evidence to support that.

>> **Rick Sommers:** How about something as basic as a multi-vitamin? Do you find that's a good thing for somebody to be taking?

>>**Patricia Kennedy:** Well, I think that that is obviously something that a person should discuss with their physician, but on the whole, many, many people take multi-vitamins and there doesn't appear to be any negative effect for MS, or, for that matter, any positive effect. I think that none of us eats perfectly and therefore if we have to supplement with a multi-vitamin, that's probably going to be okay.

>> **Rick Sommers:** I work all day and I've got to come home and whip something together for dinner. Meal preparation is really the last thing I want to think about after a long day. What are some ways to circumvent that, kind of, [to the end around] besides takeout?

>>**Patricia Kennedy:** Absolutely besides takeout. That gets expensive.

>> **Rick Sommers:** Yes.

>>**Patricia Kennedy:** People with MS, in addition to having worked all day, they're also fatigued to begin with, and so for them, when they come home at the end of the day, they're very tired and they know they need to eat. And so it really behooves them to do any number of things that might work for them. Sometimes perhaps on a weekend when they might have rested better or have more energy, they might cook in larger amounts, freeze it in small amounts, so that when they come home they just pop it out of the freezer and are able to eat it. But they've made it themselves, so it's probably going to be more nutritious.

People who live on some packaged frozen foods are getting a high sodium content, and while it may fill their tummies, in the long run it's not the most healthy choice for what they can do.

Having raw fruits, raw vegetables around that they can eat without any preparation is a very good idea. And planning ahead is a good idea, so that you don't have to think after you get home, park the car, walk up the stairs. You don't have to think about what is it I'm going to make tonight. I already know what I'm going to have tonight. It takes a lot of energy just to think about what to have. So, if it's already planned, already ready and things are in the house, you don't have to go to the store to get them, it's quite easy to save that energy and to eat a healthy diet.

Tom>> Well, I know I sure spend a lot of energy thinking about what I want to eat. Now I know that if I just plan a little better, I can save some energy!

Tracey>> For both of us! What I like about what Pat said is I need to just be sensible and pay attention to my diet and follow good nutrition guidelines. And that's something that I *can* control.

Tom>> And that saves me from having to think about this at all. I just eat what she eats.

Tracey>> And that keeps us both healthy. Join us again with Pat Kennedy as we dive into other wellness topics like staying active and managing heat.

Tom>> See you then.