

Nutrition

- A healthy diet is imperative for sustainable long-term health and reducing the risk of chronic disease.
- Good quality lean protein consumption can help to minimise muscles wasting and reduce twitching.
- A good diet can enhance immunity, concentration and endurance.

Nutrition in a Nutshell

Nutrition is the science of how food is used in the body, specifically the digestion, absorption and metabolism of the food we eat and nutrients. For most people nutrition refers simply to our diet, or the everyday food we eat, and how it can help or hinder health outcomes.

Good nutrition ensures a varied diet that affords us all the vitamins, minerals, antioxidants that we need as well as a balanced distribution of the macronutrients (carbohydrates, proteins and fats). Additionally, good nutrition can with weight management, reducing the risk of developing chronic diseases and improving mood.

Food matters: Post-polio & Your Diet

Why is nutrition so important for polio survivors?

Some of the issues seen in post-polio syndrome can be better managed when your diet is on point.

Muscle atrophy (or sarcopaenia), muscle fatigue and other inflammatory musculoskeletal issues are commonly seen in post-polio syndrome. Osteoporosis and osteopaenia can also occur as a result of limited weight bearing activity, inflammation and sarcopaenia.

All of these conditions can reduce mobility and quality of life, as well as being the drivers behind the development or progression of common comorbidities such as:

- Overweight and obesity
- Cardiovascular disease and stroke
- Type 2 diabetes
- Mild cognitive impairment and dementias
- Low mood and depression
- Some cancers

The good news is that making a change to your diet can improve your health outcomes and help you better manage the symptoms of post-polio syndrome by:

- Improving body composition and weight
- Reducing systemic inflammation
- Reducing muscle pain and weakness, restless legs
- Reducing muscle fatigue
- Improving muscle strength
- Improving mobility - fewer falls and reduced impact of falls
- Increasing exercise endurance
- Improving sleep and sleep apnoea
- Reducing snoring and general fatigue
- Enhancing general healing and immunity
- Improving mood and cognition
- Reducing disease risk and may reduce reliance on medications

What foods to eat?

- **Anti-inflammatory diet:** Eat plenty of vegetables & fruit, nuts and seeds

Include fibre - mostly from fruits and vegetables but include small portions of wholegrains like buckwheat, brown rice, quinoa, starchy vegetables like potato, sweet potato and pumpkin

Include fresh herbs and spices - ginger, garlic, onion, chillies, turmeric
- **Protein:** Aim for 25g-30g protein at each main meal to preserve skeletal muscle mass (for example, 1 egg contains about 6g protein and 100g beef contains about 25g protein)

Don't forget about plant-based protein too. This includes legumes (chickpeas, lentils etc), nuts and seeds and tofu
- **Fats:** Don't be afraid to include fat but not too much. Quality is key: olive oil and olives, oily fish like salmon sardine and mackerel, nuts and seeds and avocado
- **Water** - it's important to stay well hydrated. Ditch the soft drink and stick with water.
- **Reduce these foods**
Limit processed and 'junk' food
Limit processed and cured meats
Limit alcohol
Limit sugars, cakes, biscuits, confectionaries, chocolate and ice-cream
Limit tea and coffee

What Else?

- Eat a broad and varied diet - add new vegetables to your meals. Try new foods
- Be prepared: Take your lunches to work so you don't rely on takeaway. Keep some healthy snack options at work (fruits, plain yoghurt or nuts)
- Exercise - do what you can and increase as you can
- Practice mindful eating - eat more slowly
- Waist circumference: chronic disease risk is increased when women have a waist circumference greater than 80 cm, and for men when their waist circumference is greater than 94cm
- Quit smoking
- Maintain friendships - stay social. If you live alone find a meal buddy and share the load of preparing healthy foods

For individualised advice, contact a nutritionist or dietitian to discuss your specific nutrition needs.

Fact sheet prepared by Melinda Overall, Overall Nutrition 2018