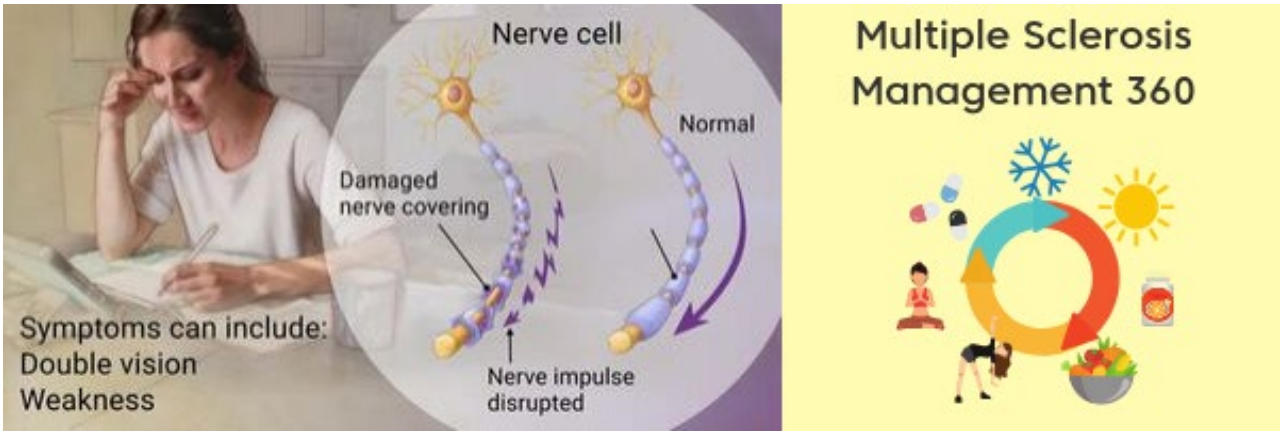


An Integrative Approach to Managing Multiple Sclerosis

The Important Contributing Factors in Addition to Medical Care and Holistic Treatments, Like Cryotherapy

In numbers, multiple sclerosis (MS) does not compare with arthritis or other widespread painful disorders. If 1 out of 4 US adults suffers from some form of rheumatic disease, only 1 in 330 gets diagnosed with MS. In the United States, it is about 1 million people.

Regardless of the numbers, there are at least **3 reasons to talk about it:**

- The truly damaging effect on the well-being of those affected and their families
- The dramatically increased risk of developing the disease if somebody in the family has it (in this case, preventive measures are important to take as early as possible)
- The fact that **almost half of the multiple sclerosis cases worldwide are registered in the US** where poor eating habits and life-style choices contribute to the increased risks of developing a disability in a big way

As in all other disorders, **only an integrative approach can provide true relief and lasting results**.

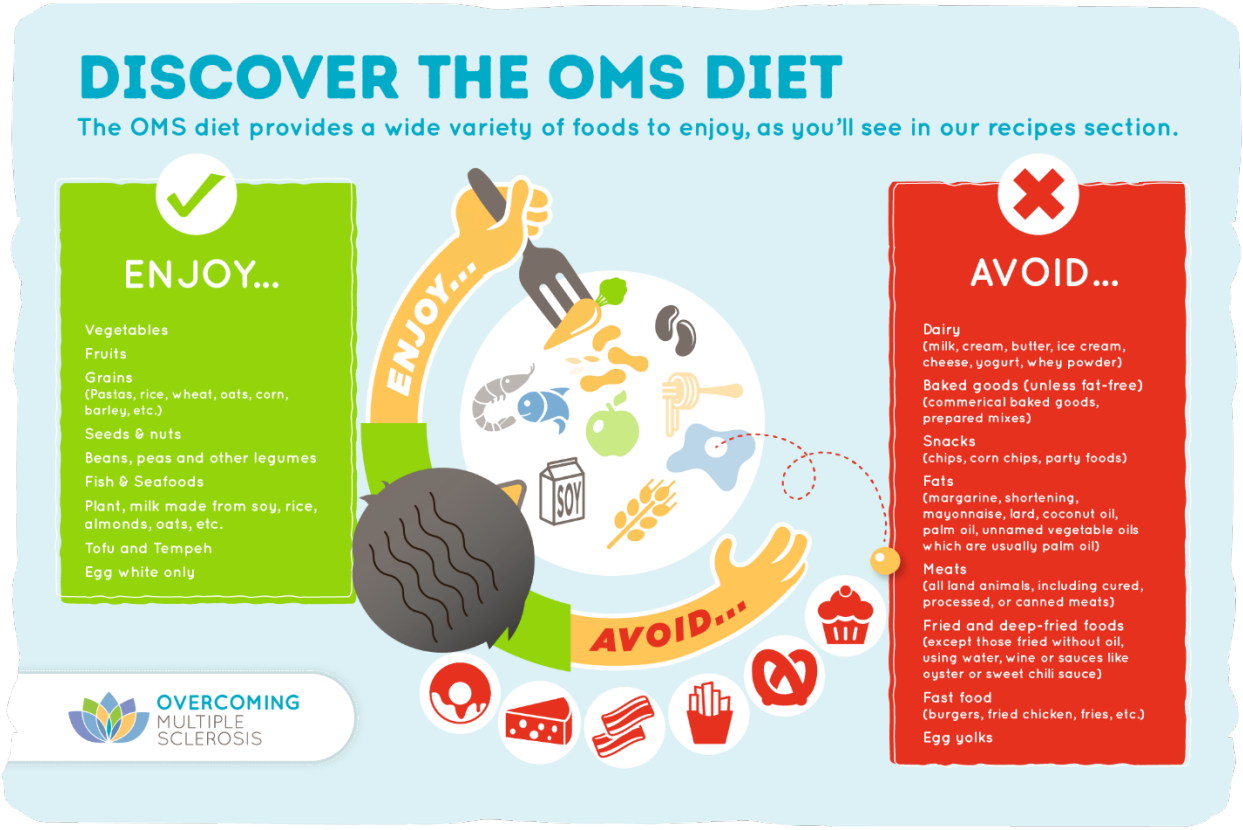
In addition to medication and treatments (including proven positive effects of whole-body cryotherapy addressed in a separate article), **the following factors play a major role** in slowing the progression and managing the symptoms of multiple sclerosis:

1. Balanced diet
2. Sun exposure and vitamin D supplements
3. Taking antioxidants
4. Movement
5. Stress management

The “Overcoming Multiple Sclerosis” Diet

Multiple studies show that a healthy and balanced diet may help significantly improve MS symptoms — for example, lift fatigue, maintain regular bowel and bladder functions, improve the health of skin, bones, teeth and gums, strengthen the heart, and improve muscle strength and flexibility. A healthy diet also helps control weight and reduce the risk of heart disease and osteoporosis.

There’s no evidence supporting superiority of one specific diet, but there are common benefits in several. For the best results, people with MS should consult with their personal physicians before starting a diet that best meets their individual needs and preferences.



A balanced diet for people with MS **should include**:

- Fish high in omega-3 fatty acids, such as salmon, herring, mackerel, tuna, sardines and lake trout
- Other unsaturated fats (e.g. flaxseed oil)
- Skinless chicken or turkey and lean meats trimmed of visible fat
- Beans, lentils, and nuts
- Fruit and vegetables (about five a day)
- Whole-grain products (three to four servings a day)

The foods that **should be avoided** include:

- Foods high in saturated fat, such as red meat
- Butter, cheese, and other full-fat dairy products

Several long-term studies show a **close connection between saturated fats** (such as those from meat and dairy) **and the development and progression of MS.**

People with MS who avoid saturated fats but consume unsaturated fats, such as those from fish and flaxseed oil, typically have reduced progression of the disease and, in many cases. experience minimal effects from it.

The most important research on MS diets to date has been done by Professor Roy Swank who conducted a 34-year study showing that people with MS consuming a diet low in saturated fat had dramatically better health outcomes.

Also, research shows a **high correlation between MS and dairy milk**, due to proteins in cow's milk.

A study involving more than 135,000 men and women in the U.S. linked cow's milk to the degenerative neurological disorder Parkinson's Disease. Researchers speculate that dairy products may have a generally toxic effect on nervous tissue.

The Benefits of Sun Exposure and the Importance of Sufficient Levels of Vitamin D

It's proven that **exposure to sunlight can reduce the incidence and severity of MS.** When the sun's UVB rays hit the skin, they produce vitamin D, a hormone that is important for good health generally, but particularly for people with MS, because it dampens overactive immune responses and protects brain cells.

Unfortunately, in many parts of the world, sunlight is too scarce, or UVB levels are too low, to produce enough vitamin D. Besides, research has shown that people with MS have lower levels of vitamin D, and that vitamin D levels are lower during MS relapses.

For the above reasons, researchers recommend that people ask for a **vitamin D level test** immediately upon being diagnosed with MS. This could be through a general practitioner or using an online kit.

It is not uncommon to have low vitamin D levels. 1 billion people across the world are vitamin D deficient. The result should be above 150nmol/L (60ng/mL in the USA).

If vitamin D levels are very low, it can be brought up quickly with a one-off megadose of vitamin D followed by regular capsules or sprays. In case of a smaller discrepancy, vitamin D supplements should be taken regularly.

Antioxidants

Since **oxidative stress is a major contributor to inflammation** in people with multiple sclerosis, taking antioxidants may slow disease progression. New research offers hope for MS patients after finding that even a common over-the-counter **antioxidant may help to slow the condition**.

For example, studies performed by Rebecca Spain, MD, MSPH, from the VA Portland Healthcare System and Oregon Health and Science University, have linked lipoic acid to decreased inflammation, as well as decreased optic nerve and spinal cord atrophy. Other common antioxidants include vitamins A and E, as well as coenzyme Q10.

The Importance of Movement

Unfortunately, people with MS tend to exercise less, due to some symptoms, such as lack of coordination, as well as exercise-induced hyperthermia.

At the same time, direct evidence shows that **exercise is extremely important for people with MS**, even those with significant disability:

- In people with mild MS, exercise improves fitness and function
- In people experiencing moderate to severe disability, it maintains function
- In people with significant disability, movement improves muscle power, exercise tolerance and mobility-related abilities (such as walking)

Studies show that **exercise also reduces depression, improves mood and general well-being** in people suffering from multiple sclerosis, and that walkable distance increases with regular treadmill training.

There is also *indirect* evidence that **exercise may modify the course of MS through a neuroprotective effect**:

- Two proteins, brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF) and nerve growth factor (NGF), help repair neurons in MS. Exercise significantly boosts these proteins
- People with MS who exercise show increased levels of neurotrophic factors
- Exercise helps prevent cognitive decline. Those who exercise the most show the least amount of brain shrinkage
- Movement exercise has a better effect on spasm and increased tone than stretching does
- Core postural strength helps correct balance problems that threaten stability
- Muscle strength protects from injury
- Exercise counteracts the effects of deconditioning

If exercise-induced hyperthermia is an issue, it can be managed using pre-exercise cooling of the body, such as cryotherapy.

Stress Management

Stress triggers relapses which is why adopting practices such as spending time outdoors, in nature, or any form of meditation is very important for people with multiple sclerosis. The clinical evidence for meditation's health benefits is enormous and growing rapidly.

Preventing the Risk of Developing MS for Family Members

There is a genetic element to multiple sclerosis which means that children, siblings and other relatives of people with MS are at a greater risk of developing it, too.

If a MS patent has an identical twin, there is a 25% chance that the twin brother or sister will also develop it.

A sibling or a child of someone with MS has an increased chance of 1 in 10 of developing the same disorder, as opposed to the general number of just 1 in 330.

While these figures can be frightening, it is important to remember that the discussed above lifestyle changes can significantly reduce the overall risk of developing MS.

Sources:

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