Parkinson's Diet and Nutrition Talk Summary - 04/11/2026

Katie Ayling, a community dietitian (NHS - Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust), delivered a practical talk on diet and nutrition for people diagnosed with Parkinson's, joined by student dietitian Katia Gardner-Thorpe. The session covered balanced eating according to the NHS Eatwell Guide, the management of protein intake alongside levodopa medication, strategies for preventing weight loss via food fortification, digestive health management, and general advice regarding supplements and hydration.

Nutrition Guidelines and Protein Management

• There is no single prescribed "Parkinson's diet" or specific restricted regimen; guidance follows general NHS Eatwell principles emphasizing balanced meals with fruit and vegetables, starchy carbohydrates, protein, and dairy.

• Organic produce is not required, and canned or frozen foods are completely suitable alternatives.

• Protein should not be restricted or eliminated, as it maintains muscle mass, assists immune response, promotes wound healing, and increases satiety. General intake targets are approximately 1.2 g per kilogram of body weight daily (for example, about 84 g per day for a 70 kg adult), distributed across meals.

• Portion guidelines include cooked meat about the size of a deck of cards (90 g), fish the size of a palm (140 g), two eggs, or half a tin of beans or pulses. Having more than two eggs a day is safe and promotes HDL ("good") cholesterol, though excessive consumption may contribute to constipation.

• For individuals on levodopa, protein can interact with medication absorption, but patients should strictly follow timing instructions from their Parkinson's specialist team rather than cutting out protein. Timing medication before or after meals as instructed is critical.

Managing Weight Loss and Food Fortification

• Unplanned weight loss may manifest through looser clothing, weakness, reduced appetite, prolonged meal times, or swallowing difficulties.

• A "food first" approach using a "1-2-3 approach" is recommended to boost calorie and nutrient density without requiring larger meal volumes:

  • 1 nourishing drink daily: Such as smoothies or fortified milk (made by mixing whole milk powder into a pint of whole milk).

• 2 small high-calorie snacks daily: Items like full-fat yoghurt, bananas, nuts, seeds, crumpets with butter, biscuits, or cheese and crackers.

• 3 fortified meals: Incorporating calorie-dense ingredients such as butter, double or single cream, cheese, mayonnaise, olive oil, honey, jam, or sugar into everyday dishes (porridge, soups, potatoes, pasta, or puddings).

• Supermarket ready meals and prepared meal delivery services (such as Wiltshire Farm Foods, which offers texture-modified meals and puddings) are practical options that can be further fortified with cheese, oil, or cream.

Vitamins, Digestive Health, and Lifestyle

• Vitamin D: A daily supplement is recommended for everyone during UK winter because sunlight levels are insufficient.

• Vitamins B12, B6, and Folate: Levels may be lower in some individuals taking levodopa, but supplementation should only occur under medical direction following blood tests rather than purchased over the counter.

• Bowel and Gut Health: For symptoms of bloating or constipation, advice includes sipping fluids steadily throughout the day, increasing dietary fibre gradually (wholemeal bread, porridge with flax or chia seeds), remaining physically active (such as seated home exercises or branch physiotherapy), and potentially considering probiotics like Symprove as a secondary option.

• Co-existing Conditions: For people balancing Parkinson's with diabetes and raised cholesterol, focus on healthy unsaturated fats (such as olive oil, nuts, and seeds) rather than sugary fortifications or excessive butter, alongside regular movement.

• Caffeine and Alcohol: Caffeine is acceptable unless it exacerbates tremors or disrupts sleep. Alcohol is permissible in moderation, aligned with NHS guidance of no more than 14 units per week with at least two consecutive alcohol-free days.

Referrals and Escalation

• Berkshire Community dietitians do not accept self-referrals; individuals needing support must request a referral through their GP, Parkinson's nurse, or neurology consultant.

• Immediate referral to a speech and language therapist (SLT) should be requested if there are signs of swallowing problems, such as coughing or clearing the throat during eating or drinking, or feeling that food gets stuck.