

## **Diet, Complementary and Alternative Medicine in MS**

### **83. What is the Swank diet?**

Several decades ago, Dr. Roy Swank (Portland, Oregon) developed a diet for MS patients which is rich in polyunsaturated fatty acids (the kinds of fatty acids found in fish oil and vegetables). Presumably, these fatty acids suppress the production of substances responsible for activating immune cells which may cause damage to myelin and axons in MS. Although the Swank diet may be helpful in immune mediated diseases such as MS, these claims have yet to be tested in rigorously tested controlled studies.

### **84. How is vitamin D associated with MS?**

Several studies have a possible beneficial effect of vitamin D in some autoimmune diseases including MS. Studies are underway to better define the role of Vitamin D in MS as an immune regulatory molecule and not just as a vitamin. Currently, it is unclear as to what is the optimal dose of Vitamin D to act as an immune regulatory molecule in MS. Most data indicate that higher blood levels of vitamin D may be needed to have an anti-inflammatory effect of vitamin D. Those studies are underway. This should be discussed with your neurologists so that blood levels and appropriate dose of vitamin D can be prescribed.

### **85. How are vitamin C, E and beta-carotene associated with MS?**

Careful use of vitamins C, E, and beta-carotene according to dietary recommendations may be beneficial in immune mediated disorders. There is no controlled data which proves the efficacy of vitamins C, E, and beta-carotene in MS. Excessive use of these vitamins may be harmful. At this time, it is not recommended that a patient take extra vitamin C, E, or beta-carotene (more than is found in a multivitamin).

### **86. How is mercury associated with MS?**

Mercury present in dental fillings was thought to be toxic to people with MS and that it could make their MS worse. However, no studies have shown such toxicity and a clear cut relationship between mercury fillings and MS.

### **87. How is hyperbaric oxygen therapy (HBOT) relate to MS?**

HBOT has been studied in MS. However, the results were conflicting. It has not been shown to have a beneficial effect on the long-term outcome in MS. With the availability of DMTs and other symptomatic treatments, HBOT is not recommended to be used in MS.

### **88. How does hydrotherapy benefit those with MS?**

Studies have showed that hydrotherapy, or pool therapy, may decrease spasticity (stiffness) in MS. Patients who are interested in hydrotherapy can enquire with their local chapter of the National MS Society (NMSS) if there is an “MS friendly pool” in their area. Local NMSS chapters can be found by calling 1-800-FIGHT-MS (1-800-344-4867) or by visiting the National Multiple Sclerosis Society at [www.nmss.org](http://www.nmss.org)

### **89. How is hippotherapy (horseback riding) benefit those with MS**

Hippotherapy has been suggested to be of possible benefit in MS, particularly in reducing spasticity and balance problems. This needs to be carried out with experienced trainers. More information may be obtained by visiting the National Multiple Sclerosis Society at [www.nmss.org](http://www.nmss.org) or by calling 1-800-FIGHT-MS (1-800-344-4867).

### **90. How is the use of vitamin B12 associated with MS?**

The use of vitamin B12 in MS has been subject of long standing debate. There is some anecdotal evidence that it may improve fatigue in MS. Currently, there is no good evidence from any controlled study that justifies vitamin B12 to MS patients who do not have vitamin B12 deficiency. It should be used only if there is a documentation of vitamin B12 deficiency or is otherwise medically indicated.

### **91. What are some commonly used herbal therapies and MS?**

Ginkgo biloba, Saint John's wort, ginseng, kava, Echinacea, saw palmetto and primrose oil are some of the commonly used herbal therapies; some of them are marketed in Europe as medications, whereas in the USA they are available as dietary supplements. While herbal therapies may have some benefit in MS, caution should be taken when using these supplements. There is considerable controversy regarding the safety and efficacy of these herbal and natural therapies in MS. For a thorough and detailed review of these therapies, please visit the National Center for Complimentary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM) of the National Institutes of Health at [nccam.nih.gov](http://nccam.nih.gov).