

17 natural ways to treat Multiple Sclerosis



Did you know that March is Multiple Sclerosis Awareness Month?

There are now nearly a million people with MS in the U.S., with women making up 74% of them.

Drugs are the current mainstay of treatment for MS, with some inroads being made, but without a definitive cure in sight. Many of my MS patients complain of side effects of their medications and are seeking alternatives. Immunosuppressive drugs like Tysabri which are sometimes deployed against MS carry serious risks.

A recent “breakthrough” approach to MS involves hematopoietic stem cell transplantation, a procedure that requires aggressive chemotherapy before the immune system is rebooted with bone marrow-derived stem cells. The procedure is experimental, drastic, and costly. Even if it works and patients withstand the intensive chemo, it’s not clear that it’ll be scalable for any but the most devastatingly afflicted MS patients.

Over the course of many years treating MS patients, I’ve come to recognize the efficacy of certain adjunctive treatments. Often, they slow the progression of the disease so fewer drugs are required and patients avoid debilitation. In some cases, I’ve seen remarkable remissions.

Here are some MS interventions that have made the news lately:

“Healthy” Diet: A recent study in the journal *Neurology* found that MS patients with the healthiest diet were 20 percent less likely to have severe disabilities compared to those with a less healthy diet. What constituted the best diet wasn’t so clear—ample fruits, vegetables and whole grains while minimizing red meat, sugar and junk seemed to afford the greatest benefits. But can we do better?

The Wahls Program: Dr. Terry Wahls is a physician who dramatically ameliorated her debilitating MS with a program centered around a version of the Paleo Diet. One of her published studies documents the efficacy of a “multimodal intervention including a modified paleolithic diet with supplements, stretching, strengthening exercises with electrical stimulation . . . and massage.” The Paleo Diet has long been my go-to strategy, not just for MS patients, but for sufferers of a wide array of autoimmune disorders.

Keto Diet: The MS benefits of the Keto diet are premised on the notion that ketones are superior to glucose as fuel for brain cells. Additionally, ketogenic diets may reduce inflammation and support cellular repair mechanisms. Several studies, albeit

small and of short duration, support the effectiveness of the Keto diet for MS.

Drop Excess Weight: The common denominator of all diets with a claim-to-fame for MS is that they restrict caloric intake and encourage weight optimization. While there are plenty of rail-thin MS sufferers, studies show that a higher body mass index (BMI) correlates with a lower brain volume in MS patients.

Go Gluten-Free: Another commonality among successful diet approaches for MS is their elimination of gluten. Gluten from wheat and other grains is a prime driver of autoimmunity. A recent review sought to clarify gluten's role in MS, and concluded that, while the research is mixed, the connection warrants further investigation.

Cocoa: All is not bleak on the diet front; cocoa recently won plaudits for its impact on MS fatigue.

Nutrient Support: A recent Israeli study demonstrated that MS patients are often suboptimal in key nutrients and had compromised antioxidant defenses. A wide range of vitamin and mineral deficiencies were noted including B vitamins, magnesium and zinc.

Alpha Lipoic Acid: Often referred to as the “master antioxidant”, alpha lipoic acid was shown to slow neurodegeneration and improve walking speed after a two-year trial in patients with secondary progressive multiple sclerosis.

Vitamin B3: There's been a lot of buzz about the potential protective role of niacinamide in MS. It works to slow progression in mice. The theory is that it supports production of the energy compound NADH in compromised brain mitochondria. Expect clinical trials of the more bioactive NADH booster *nicotinamide riboside* for MS and other brain disorders.

Curcumin: Research has established curcumin as a potent anti-inflammatory, antioxidant agent that could shield against CNS-related disorders. A recent study proposed curcumin as a “neuroprotective and neuropharmacological drug” for MS.

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Omega 3s: Fish oil derivatives EPA and DHA are constituents of the cell membranes of nerve cells and exert immune-regulatory and anti-inflammatory effects. Early trials aim at ascertaining whether Omega 3 administration will retard MS progression.

Vitamin D: People living in the nine U.S. states comprising the Northeast – Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Vermont – had an MS prevalence of 377 per 100,000 inhabitants, while those in the South and West each had prevalence rates of 277 per 100,000. Could it be the sunlight that triggers the skin's vitamin D production? Doses in trials of vitamin D administration for MS patients have ranged as high as 14,000 IU/day; the verdict is out on the safest and most effective amount.

Biotin: High-dose biotin enjoyed a brief heyday as a treatment for MS—so much so that they were going to turn it into a prescription drug. But it turns out it causes false thyroid and other blood tests; even worse, it may triple the relapse rate in primary progressive MS.

Probiotics: The “Gut-Brain Connection” is the subject of intense research. Hence, it's not surprising that probiotics are being investigated for MS. A small Harvard study has demonstrated that the probiotic VSL-3 shifted the disordered microbiomes

of subjects with MS toward normalcy.

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Helminth Therapy: While we're talking about the microbiome, how about ingesting some (harmless) parasitic worms? That's the idea behind a **novel therapy** that invokes the Hygiene Hypothesis, based on the known protective effects of roundworm colonization against autoimmunity.

LDN: Low dose naltrexone, a specially-compounded version of the drug Naloxone used to treat heroin overdoses, works with the body's endorphin and enkephalin systems to re-acquire immune balance. A recent study showed that LDN lowers levels of inflammatory proteins in MS. Human trials have yielded promising results.

Cannabinoids: Lots of research supports the use of cannabis-derived products for MS. Whether CBD works alone or requires THC for optimal results hasn't yet been completely elucidated. Cannabinoids may help with pain, spasm, mood, and might even slow the inflammatory process that damages myelin.

If you or a loved one has been diagnosed with MS, please consider seeing an integrative practitioner to discuss harnessing some of these approaches. In my experience, the earlier in the course of your disease you access innovative strategies, the more likely your chance of success.

See also my recent article "The top 15 supplements for natural MS treatment".

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