

Diet and Nutrition



Things Change!



When your body system is not functioning well, it becomes more sensitive to the environment.

Light, sound, temperature, and chemicals may affect you in new ways.

The things we take into the body may also affect us more than in the past. Alcohol, caffeine, and certain foods may not be tolerated well anymore.

Learning through trial and error, most people with ME/CFS make significant lifestyle changes.

Some Basic Ideas about Digestion and ME/CFS

- With a compromised immune system and reduced energy, diet becomes a variable of recovery that should be considered. Approximately 10 percent of the energy we produce daily is used for digestion. Individuals with CFS may struggle to eat as they used to. Overeating or eating the wrong foods overloads the system and takes energy needed for healing and recovery. Do not eat until you are completely full. Leave the table just a little hungry. The sensation of hunger will subside within 30 minutes or less.
- Eat light meals three to five times per day. It is important to maintain stable blood sugar levels. Being active without eating can be an energy drain. If you're not hungry in the morning, consider having a snack or eating some fruit to get your day started. However, have another meal within an hour or two to prevent your blood sugar levels from dropping too low. Try to eat as little as possible after 7 p.m., as the body shifts energy to rebuilding cells while you sleep. Accordingly, the body digests food at a slower pace while you sleep. If food lingers too long in the stomach, bacteria may overgrow and cause food fermentation. This causes gas, bloating, and possibly pain. Eating late at night can also lead to acid reflux and negatively affect blood sugar management, blood pressure, and weight. Some of this is because people often eat for recreational purposes in the evening and make poor food choices.

Your Stomach is No Longer an Olympic Champion

- Fats are the food element that requires the most energy to digest, approximately five times the energy needed to digest carbohydrates. Protein requires three times the energy of carbohydrates to digest. Thus, meats such as steak or hamburgers can put a strain on the system. Smaller amounts of chicken, turkey, eggs, fish, and plant foods rich in protein, such as beans, can ensure adequate protein intake. Overall, a balanced diet is the key. We should eat to live and not live to eat.
- Eat plenty of fruits and vegetables. Since digestion is generally impaired, big salads may be challenging to handle. Therefore, a juicer can be a nice addition to your kitchen equipment.



What to Avoid



Avoid junk foods. They contain little nutrition and can impair your digestion. If you must have some, eat *tiny* snacks only once or twice daily.

There are certain mood-enhancing drugs that are commonly indulged in within many cultures. As popular as they are, remember that alcohol and tobacco are poisons that will not be tolerated well by a weak system. Other recreational drugs are similar in their effects.

Caffeine drinks are beloved by many. However, jacking up your system artificially can be counterproductive to pacing, the most essential tool in the recovery bag.

Diet and Inflammation

- Inflammation is the body's response to an injury or other problem. It's a normal, critical reaction that signals the immune system that something is wrong, allowing it to fight off infections or heal injuries. These signals are transmitted via proteins called cytokines. Cytokines can signal the body to fight viruses, produce more white blood cells, combat tumors, or defend against bacterial infections. These processes are essential to good health. However, chronic inflammation can damage healthy cells, tissues, and organs. Over time, this can lead to diseases like [diabetes](#), [rheumatoid arthritis](#), and [heart disease](#).
- Refined carbohydrates, red meat, sugary drinks, fried foods, and margarine can contribute to inflammation in the body. Non-food issues that can contribute to inflammation are chronic stress, obesity, an imbalance of healthy and unhealthy microbes in the gut, poor sleep, tobacco, alcohol, and exposure to toxins.

So, What Diet is Best?



Viral conditions are often a predisposing factor in developing ME/CFS.

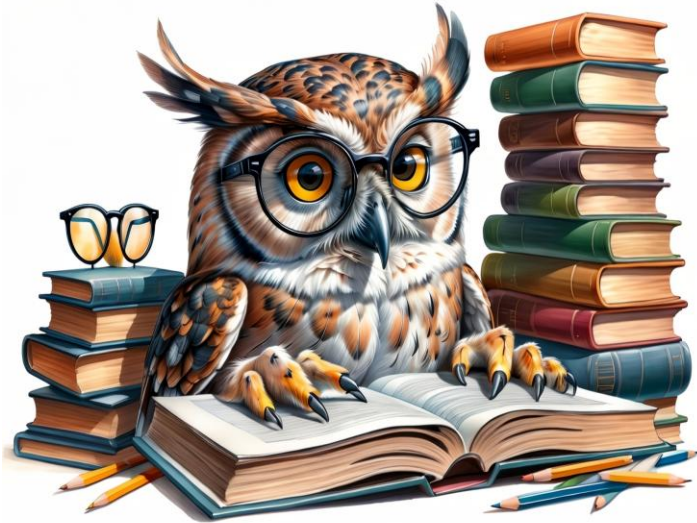
The Mediterranean diet, which emphasizes fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins, and healthy fats like olive oil, has been shown to have anti-inflammatory effects. A study published in the Journal of Nutrients found that a Mediterranean-style diet was associated with reduced levels of C-reactive protein, a marker of inflammation in the body. Getting enough water each day to help flush out toxins is also an important consideration.

Going vegetarian is another option some try. It is essential to become educated and make sure you are getting all the nutrients you need if you go this route. Depending upon how restrictive the diet is, vegetarians sometimes do not get enough protein, vitamin B-12, omega-3, calcium, and zinc.

Science and Supplements

Since the exact cause of ME/CFS is unknown, it should not be surprising that there is no one supplement or medication that cures the disorder. A review of the literature performed by Dorczok et al., published in *Nutrients* 17 (3) Jan. 2025, said the evidence was weak for any supplements being helpful due to methodological flaws and the small numbers of subjects in the groups studied. However, there was some mixed evidence that supplements that aid the mitochondria in producing ATP, the body's energy currency, can be helpful. The two main mitochondrial supplements studied were **CoQ10 and NADH**. CoQ10 enhances ATP production and reduces ROS generation. NADH donates electrons to the electron transport chain during the production of ATP, mitigates ROS accumulation, and enhances the cell's capacity to scavenge free radicals. Reactive oxygen species (ROS) are byproducts of cellular metabolism. Overaccumulation of ROS can lead to oxidative stress in cells.

Supplements and Common Sense



Since it is not clear how much supplements can help with overcoming CFS, do not spend too much money or waste excess energy on them.

Just because supplements won't cure CFS doesn't mean you cannot take supplements known to support general health, such as multi-vitamins, omega-3s, or antioxidants.

Supplements are attractive because taking a pill is easy. Recovery from CFS will likely take an investment in developing good habits in pacing, strengthening mental health, finding joy, and engaging in careful movement and exercise.