

Beware the soda

Sugary beverages linked to more severe symptoms for people with multiple sclerosis

NEW German research has found that drinking soda and other sugar-sweetened drinks appears to be linked with more severe symptoms and disability in individuals with multiple sclerosis (MS).

Carried out by researchers at St. Josef Hospital in Bochum, Germany, the new preliminary study looked at 135 people with MS who were asked to complete a questionnaire about their diet.

The researchers then analysed each participant's diet to see how close it was to the Dietary Approaches to Stop Hypertension (Dash) diet, which is high in whole grains, fruits and vegetables, low-fat dairy products, lean meats, poultry, fish, nuts and legumes, and low in saturated fat and sugar.

The Dash diet was chosen by the researchers as following the Dash diet has been linked to a lower risk of other chronic diseases such as cardiovascular disease, high blood pressure, and diabetes.

The participants' level of disability was also measured using a scale ranging from 0 points (no symptoms) to 10 points (death due to MS). A total of 30 participants had severe disability.

The findings, which are due to be presented at the American Academy of Neurology's 71st Annual Meeting in Philadelphia next month, showed that those who drank the most soda and sugary drinks — an average of 290 calories

of sugar-sweetened beverages per day, or the equivalent of about two cans of non-diet soda — were five times more likely to have severe disability than people who seldom drank sugar-sweetened beverages and who consumed an average of just seven calories in sugar-sweetened beverages per day, or the equivalent of one-and-a-half cans of non-diet soda per month. No link was found between what participants ate and their level of disability.

"MS patients often want to know how diet and specific foods can affect the progression of their disease," said study author Elisa Meier-Gerding, MD. "While we did not find a link with overall diet, interestingly, we did find a link with those who drank sodas, flavoured juices and sweetened teas and coffees."

"While these results need to be confirmed by larger studies that follow people over a long period of time, and the results do not show that soda and sugar-sweetened beverages cause more severe disability, we do know that sodas have no nutritional value and people with MS may want to consider reducing or eliminating them from their diet," Meier-Gerding said.

NUTRITION AND MS

Another small-scale study published recently found that nutrition may also play a role in helping to reduce feelings of fatigue often associated with MS.

After looking at 40 patients with MS,



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the researchers found that cocoa, which is found in dark chocolate and is rich in flavonoids — substances also found in fruit and vegetables and associated with anti-inflammatory properties — could help ease fatigue slightly. The researchers

say that if the findings are confirmed in larger studies, then adding cocoa into the diet could be a simple way to help ease fatigue, a symptom that affects nine out of 10 people with MS but is very hard to treat.

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