



# Living with NMO

## Dietary information





The Walton Centre in  
Liverpool and John

The Walton Centre   
NHS Foundation Trust

*Excellence in Neuroscience*



Oxford University Hospitals   
NHS Trust

Radcliffe Hospital in Oxford are recognised as  
specialist NHS centres in the diagnosis and care of  
patients with Neuromyelitis Optica (NMO) in the UK

Please contact either centre if you have any further  
concerns regarding your diagnosis or symptoms.

This booklet can be provided in other formats including  
large print or as an audio file. Please contact either  
specialist centre for details or go to [www.nmouk.nhs.uk](http://www.nmouk.nhs.uk)

**NMO Service**

Walton Centre Foundation Trust  
Lower Lane  
Fazakerley  
Liverpool L9 7LJ

Contact: 0151-529-8357

[nmo.advice@thewaltoncentre.nhs.uk](mailto:nmo.advice@thewaltoncentre.nhs.uk)

**NMO Service**

John Radcliffe Hospital  
West Wing  
Headley Way  
Oxford OX3 9DU

Contact: 01865-231905

[nmo.advice@ouh.nhs.uk](mailto:nmo.advice@ouh.nhs.uk)



**NMO SPECTRUM-UK**  
Registered Charity No 1158104

**NMO SPECTRUM-UK**  
working to support the NHS and  
sufferers of NMOSD throughout  
the UK.

No **MO**re Suffering Alone

# **This booklet aims to give you information on:**

- A healthy balanced diet
- Important nutrients to consider in relation to NMOSD
- Practical tips to help control weight gain
- Healthy meal ideas for a varied and well-balanced diet

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# Living and eating well with NMOSD

Being diagnosed with NMOSD or a related condition does not mean that you need to follow a special diet or avoid certain foods. Eating a varied and well-balanced diet is the best way to make sure that you supply your body with all the nutrients it needs each day. Your nervous system works best when its cells have the right nutrition to maintain their structure and to renew and repair themselves.





A healthy balanced diet can also help to complement your medical treatments and improve your day to day health and wellbeing. Living with NMOSD can mean having to deal with a range of symptoms including: low mood and fatigue, reduced mobility levels, and bladder and bowel problems. These symptoms can all potentially impact on your day to day eating habits and activity levels.

In addition the side effects from medications used to treat NMOSD may also have an affect upon your day to day dietary intake and wellbeing.

# Benefits of a Healthy Diet

A well balanced diet is important for helping to maintain your general health and wellbeing by:

- Providing you with a balance of nutrients to help maintain your strength and energy levels
- Helping to lower your risk of heart disease, stroke, diabetes and osteoporosis
- Helping you to manage your weight
- Helping you to maintain a healthy immune system and digestion

## **According to NHS guidelines you should:**

- Eat lots of fruit and veg
- Eat more fish
- Cut down on saturated fat and sugar
- Eat less salt
- Get active and be a healthy weight
- Don't get thirsty
- Don't skip breakfast

# The Eatwell Guide

The Eatwell Guide illustrates the Government's advice for healthy eating. It consists of five food groups which visually show how much is needed for you to achieve a healthy, balanced diet. The guide is suitable whether you eat meat or are vegetarian or vegan.



Starchy carbohydrates - Bread, Pasta, Rice, Potatoes

Fruit and vegetables

Proteins - Meat, Fish, Eggs and Plant Based Choices

Dairy - Milk, Yogurts, Cheese or Plant Based Choices

Fats and sugars

## Carbohydrate Foods

- Provide energy, vitamins and minerals  
e.g. fortified cereals
- High fibre options can help to maintain a healthy bowel habit
- Aim to include one serving at each meal
- 1 serving = Fist size



## Fruit and Vegetables



- Great source of fibre, vitamins and minerals  
Aim to eat 5 servings/day
- Includes sweet potatoes
- Fresh, frozen, dried, canned all count
- 1 serving = 1 Handful
- 1 serving of juice or smoothie 150mls daily

# Protein Foods

- Protein is essential to maintain muscle and for growth and repair
- Protein foods are a great source of vitamins and minerals e.g. B12, Iron and Zinc
- Healthy animal sources include: chicken, turkey, fish, eggs
- Aim for 2 servings of fish a week; one to include an oily fish for omega 3 fatty acids e.g mackerel, salmon, trout, sardines, herring and kippers
- Aim to eat less processed and red meat e.g. ham, bacon, burgers, sausages, pâté. Red meat includes all beef, pork, lamb and venison
- Healthy plant based sources include: nuts, seeds, beans and pulses. These also provide fibre too!





# Fibre Foods

You need fibre in your diet to maintain a healthy bowel and regular bowel habit. Most people do not eat enough fibre in their diet. To increase this:

- Choose high fibre starchy foods with your meals and snacks e.g. high fibre cereals, potato with skins, brown rice, wholemeal bread, pasta and noodles etc
- Aim for 5 fruit and vegetables a day
- Add pre soaked dried or canned beans and pulses to casseroles, meat based dishes, stir fries etc 1 serving counts towards your 5 a day
- Include nuts and seeds e.g. sprinkle tsp. of seeds onto cereals e.g. linseeds, chia seeds. Try a handful of nuts for a healthy snack e.g. almonds, hazelnuts
- Remember to increase your fibre intake gradually and that fibre needs fluids to work effectively



# Hydration

- Drinking enough each day is vital for maintaining your health and well-being
- Not drinking enough can impact on your energy, blood pressure, bladder and bowel health
- Drinks containing alcohol and caffeine can irritate your bladder and digestive system
- Although tea, coffee, cola drinks etc. provide water, if you drink a lot of these, they will increase your caffeine consumption
- Decaffeinated drinks can be considered a suitable alternative - discuss with your



practitioner for advice

- Aim to drink 6-8 glasses of water, lower fat milk, sugar-free drinks including tea and coffee per day
- Limit fruit juice an/or smoothies to a total of 150ml a day

# Steroid use in NMOSD

Steroids are mainly used to reduce inflammation and suppress the immune system. There is a possibility that long term use may impact on your:

- Blood Sugar Levels
- Body Shape and Weight
- Bone Health
- Blood Pressure



Steroids may also lead to an increase in your appetite. Planning and maintaining a regular meal pattern based around healthy choices can *help* to:

- Minimise any weight gain
- Keep your blood sugar levels healthy
- Manage food cravings

# Top Tips for managing weight on steroids

- Write a weekly meal plan and shopping list
- Maintain a regular meal pattern each day
- Try keeping a food diary; this can help you to be more aware of what you are eating and why
- Identify a couple of realistic healthy eating goals
- Keep focused on your goals and don't let any slip ups make you lose sight of the progress you have made

## Bone Health - Calcium

- Calcium is important for helping to maintain healthy bones
- See page 10 of this booklet for dairy sources of calcium
- Other good sources of calcium include: *canned* oily fish, tofu, green leafy veg, pulses, tahini, dried figs, almonds, brazil, hazelnuts and calcium fortified breads and cereals -check the individual food labels for information

# Bone Health - Vitamin D

- Vitamin D works alongside calcium to help maintain healthy bones and teeth
- Most people obtain their Vitamin D through safe sunlight exposure during April - September
- You are more at risk of a low Vitamin D if: your sunlight exposure is limited, you are over 65 years of age, you have a darker skin tone
- The main dietary sources of Vitamin D are:
  - ⇒ Foods of animal origin such as oily fish, egg yolks and cod liver oil
  - ⇒ Fortified foods such as margarines, breakfast cereals, dried/evaporated milks, dairy/dairy free yogurts all may be fortified on a voluntary basis - check the individual food labels for information



## Healthy Snacking Tips

- Try asking yourself why you are thinking of having a snack e.g. Are you hungry? Have you missed a meal? Have you recently exercised?
  - It can be easy to mistake hunger for being thirsty. Try having a glass of water or sugar free squash to see if you feel satisfied with a drink alone.
  - Keep a note during the day of what you are eating and drinking. This can help you to identify particular 'trigger' points in the day and where you are more likely to snack. Focus on one 'trigger' point at a time e.g. mid-afternoon or evening time.
  - If you find yourself frequently choosing high calorie snacks and drinks during your day such as chocolate, crisps, biscuits and sweets try to:
    - Not buy these or keep them out of sight
    - Have smaller serving sizes e.g. fun-sized chocolate
    - Keep them for an occasional treat
    - Change4Life have a range of lower [100 calories snacks](#) ideas on their website such as the ideas below.
- ⇒ Fat Free / Lower Calorie Yogurt and Mousses
  - ⇒ Fresh or tinned fruit salad
  - ⇒ Vegetable sticks and tbsp. lower-fat hummus
  - ⇒ 2-3 small plain rice cakes or water crackers with extra light cheese spread or triangle
  - ⇒ Sugar-free jelly
  - ⇒ One crumpet or scotch pancake and scrape of jam

## Trusted Online Nutritional Sources:

- Be careful when you search online for any nutritional advice
- Check out the credentials of the author. Often dietary advice may be based on someone's nutritional opinion, not on a sound evidence base
- If something sounds too good to be true, then it probably is too good to be true



# USEFUL INFORMATION

**Healthy Eating Live Well NHS Choices**

[www.nhs.uk/livewell/healthy-eating](http://www.nhs.uk/livewell/healthy-eating)

**NHS change 4 Life**

[www.nhs.uk/change4life](http://www.nhs.uk/change4life)

**Multicultural food**

[www.theismaili.org/nutrition](http://www.theismaili.org/nutrition)

**British Dietetic Association**

[British Dietetic Association: Food Fact Sheets](#)



## About the Authors

### **Emma Carder—Specialist Neurology Dietitian**

Emma has been working within the NMO team since September 2015. An experience dietitian, Emma has kindly provided much of the dietary information within this booklet.

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Kerry set up the NMO Nursing service in 2010. She has worked within Neurology for a total of 19 years including neuro rehabilitation and MS Nursing.

### **Sam Linaker - NMO Nurse Specialist**

Sam joined the team in 2016 and has a wide range of nursing experience in Neurology, Urology, Endocrinology and community based nursing.

### **Tricia Kelly - NMO Nurse Specialist**

Tricia joined the team in 2017 having worked on the day ward here administering Rituximab. Her varied background includes critical care, A&E and Midwifery.

#### **Disclaimer**

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