The MS Swank Diet

by DR. DONNA

The Swank Multiple Sclerosis Diet

One of the old-time strategies for making the symptoms of multiple sclerosis go into remission was to follow a low-fat diet, one that was first proposed by a medical doctor named Roy Swank.

With what we know now about fat, it may be important to put the low-fat (17%) Swank diet into perspective before you start it. Dr. Swank began his studies at the end of the 1940s with 150 patients in Montreal who had multiple sclerosis. He found that of the patients who consumed 17 grams of fat, only 21% had serious problems, in comparison to those who ate a diet of 30 grams of fat and 75% of them had serious problems. In the group that ate the most fat in their diet (49 grams of fat), 81% of them had serious problems over 20 years.

Swank hypothesizes that saturated fats and polyunsaturated fats were the cause of the problems of those with multiple sclerosis.

Knowing what we know now about diet and nutrition, plus knowing the potential causes of multiple sclerosis and how the disease progresses, the low-fat Swank diet is not necessarily a good idea. The reason why is that the American diet was vastly different in the 1940s than it is now.

What Did People Eat in the 1940s?

Here's a list of some of the differences in diet in the 1940s:

- Meats were primarily pasture-raised and ate grasses, thus their meat was higher in omega-3 fats.
- Milk was generally full-fat milk, as skim milk didn't appear on the scene until years later.
- During the war, there was plenty of margarine and vegetable oils passed out to the population. This replaced the butter and good fats.
- Because the animals were pasture-raised, meats were naturally lower in fat than they are now. The meats didn't contain high marbling. Men still hunted for meat. Anyone who hunts for wild game meat knows that it takes a long time to cook wild meats so they will not be tough. The amount of fat in the meat makes it moist.
- People ate a lot of white flour and wheat flour was almost unheard of.
- People made a lot of casseroles back then and ate foods like tomato soup (canned).
- During the war, rations included 100 grams of margarine and 100 grams of cooking fat, 50 grams of butter, along with bacon and ham.
- Rice Krispies and other processed cereals hit the grocery store shelves.
- Housewives were told to save their fats after cooking because the soldiers needed them to make explosives. (Spent frying oils are still considered hazardous wastes).
- Sugar use was rampant.

Compare That 1940s Diet to Now

Our diet now:

- Cattle are corn-fed now and not pasture-fed. Corn is high in omega-6 fats and genetically engineered. This leads to inflammation and oxidized fats producing higher levels of free radicals that can target the brain and nervous system tissue.
- Sugar and high fructose corn syrup consumption is incredibly high, rising every decade. This causes the insulin response, which speeds up the degeneration of every chronic condition, such as multiple sclerosis.
- Fake fats are still in our diet, and too many high omega-6 fats are present in our diet. Fake fats sit on the fat receptors blocking good fats from doing their job.
- Butter and whole milk are often shunned in favor of lower-fat versions of foods. Lowered saturated fat and overall fat, if someone is on a low-fat diet, leads to lower levels of hormones produced in the body.

The Critique of the MS Swank Diet

What we know now is that first of all, vitamin D deficiency is closely tied to the appearance of multiple sclerosis. This could account for the ability of Swank to find 150 patients with multiple sclerosis back at the end of the 1940s. They lived in Montreal, a city not known for sunny days.

Also, Swank blames fat for everything, but now we know it’s not all fats but rather bad fats: margarines, trans fats and vegetable oils other than olive oil that can cause the production of oxidized fats in the body. Oxidized fats are unable to be used to fulfill the functions of fat in the body.

Swank recommends a high-grain diet, but genetically engineered grains started increasing in number in the 1940s, and that’s not a good idea anymore. There’s a correlation of celiac disease with multiple sclerosis, and wheat should be avoided. Cereals should also never be boxed, as processing increases the rate of advanced glycation end products produced in them. These AGEs will cause rapid acceleration of every degenerative disease, including multiple sclerosis.

Be very careful when interpreting diet information from the past. It’s not always applicable to now. Your best diet strategies for multiple sclerosis are cutting out all gluten, fake fats, and sugars, only eating natural fats, taking multiple vitamin and mineral supplements to complement your needs, and restoring vitamin D levels.