

What about the Swank diet? by Dr. Caroline Harvey-Smith PhD., N.D.

It has been thought for some time that diet may play a key role in the development of MS. It is a fairly common disease in the US and Europe, but almost unheard of in countries such as Japan, Korea and China, and it has been suggested that this difference can be partially attributed to the consumption of **saturated fats, cholesterol and alcohol**. These items, which are much more common in Western diets, lead to the production of prostaglandin 2 (PG2), a hormone-like substance that promotes the inflammatory response, worsening the symptoms of MS. Asian diets are typically rich in marine foods, seeds, nuts and fruit oils which are high in essential fatty acids including omega-3 which have a well demonstrated inhibitory effect on the inflammatory response.

In the late 1940's Dr. Roy L. Swank followed a group of 144 MS patients and was able to establish that there was a significant relationship between the amount of fat consumed and the progression of MS. The results of this research lead Dr. Swank to publish a book in 1972 called "The Multiple Sclerosis Diet Book". The study continued to follow the patients over a 34-year period and was published in the world's leading medical journals *The Lancet* in 1990. The results of the study showed that those patients who followed the diet did not show any significant progression of their condition over a 34 year period, while those that did not follow the diet did a significant worsening of symptoms over the same period. More recent articles, have shown that the positive effect of the low fat diet was observed even after 44 years.

To quote Dr Swank himself: "After considerable research, I developed a plan for the treatment of multiple sclerosis that absolutely anyone can do. A lifestyle change will have to take place, which may be a challenge for you, but the challenges of living with a disability are much greater. My 50 years of research and working with approximately 5,000 people have proven that this protocol works to slow progression of the disease as well as benefit overall health."

The Swank MS foundation, a public charity that gives information and resources on the diet, provides the following quick reference:

1. Saturated fat should not exceed 15 grams per day.
2. Unsaturated fat (oils) should be kept to 20-50 grams per day.
3. No red meat for the first year.
4. After the first year, 3 oz. of red meat is allowed once per week.
5. Dairy products must contain 1% or less butterfat unless otherwise noted.
6. No processed foods containing saturated fat.
7. Cod liver oil (1 tsp. or equivalent capsules) and a multi-vitamin and mineral supplement are recommended daily.
8. Products to be studiously avoided include: margarine, butter, shortening, lard, cocoa butter, coconut oil, palm oil, hydrogenated oil, imitation dairy products.

Although I do not have extensive first-hand experience with the utilization of the Swank diet *per se*, the premise of the diet and Dr. Swank's results are very compelling, and I certainly recommend a low saturated fat diet, with essential fatty acid supplementation to my MS patients as part of a treatment protocol. It does appear, however, that long term sufferers of MS may not benefit as much as younger people, just beginning to exhibit symptoms, who are more likely to find that a diet of this kind can slow or even stop the progression of the disease.