MAST CELL ACTION

Gaining Weight on a Low Dairy Diet

Nourishing Health and Happiness with MCAS

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Patient Information Forum



Registered Charity Number 1164917

Disclaimers

Trigger warning - this document is about food and contains images of food.

We recognise that many of the images in this guide contain foods that are restricted on low histamine diets. The images are from stock photos and do not exactly reflect a low histamine diet. We have done our best to reduce references to high-histamine foods wherever possible.

Everyone with MCAS is different, and this is general information, not tailored to your individual needs. This resource is intended to be used alongside support from a qualified health professional. Please seek advice from your medical practitioner or dietitian for specific dietary guidance.

We hope you will be confident to adapt the guidance and recipes for your circumstances, and swap out foods that you are not able to tolerate for others that you are.

This sheet is designed for adults with Mast Cell Activation Syndrome. The nutritional needs of children and teenagers will differ, and the nutritional needs of individuals with specific medical conditions will vary.

If your diet is very limited and you feel that you are struggling to get enough nutrients in your diet or have a specific medical condition that may have specific dietary needs, then please ensure you seek individualised dietary advice from a dietitian with experience in this area.

This resource is designed to support, not replace, tailored advice from your medical team.

For more information about low histamine diets and other dietary adjustments, please see our Self-Management Toolkit HERE

Introduction

Why Does Diet Matter?

Diet plays a really important role in helping those with MCAS, but can also be one of the trickiest areas to navigate, as those with MCAS often have dietary triggers.

What you eat can directly influence mast cell behaviour and histamine levels in the body.

Common Dietary Challenges with MCAS

People with MCAS often face considerable challenges with food, including:

- Food sensitivities and intolerances: MCAS can cause reactivity to a wide range of foods.
- Variable and evolving triggers: Food triggers can change over time or vary based on other factors such as stress, hormone levels, illness, or environmental exposures.
- Digestive issues: Symptoms like bloating, nausea, abdominal pain, and altered bowel habits are common and may require additional dietary adjustments.
- Nutritional adequacy: Due to multiple food restrictions, maintaining a balanced, nutrient-rich diet can be difficult without careful planning.

Gaining Weight on a Low Dairy Diet

Although there is no official diet for those who have MCAS, many people with the condition follow a dairy-free diet as a way to manage their symptoms.

Some people with MCAS may struggle to maintain their weight and find themselves unintentionally losing weight during flare-ups, or have a low body mass index (BMI). It is important to try and maintain a healthy weight as being malnourished can have negative effects on our health (see malnutrition sheet).

Dairy-free diets can often be lower in energy and protein, which may make it harder to maintain or gain weight.

HELPFUL TIP
Create a list of your favourite 'safe' foods and keep this handy



How can you gain weight if following a dairy free diet?

- If you can't manage large meals or have a smaller appetite, then try and eat little and often throughout the day. Aim to eat 5-6 times a day or every 3 hours if possible. If this isn't achievable for you, you can try splitting meals in half or grazing throughout the day.
- Adding foods high in calories can be helpful to add extra energy without you having to eat a lot more if you are struggling with a small appetite.
- Add dairy-free cheeses based on coconut oil, nuts, or soya into pasta dishes, soups, pizza, or any other dishes.
- Have nourishing snacks such as houmous on crackers with a slice of avocado, dairy-free cheese on toast, or crackers with nut butters.
- Add nuts and seeds to salads, cereal, or have as snacks.
- If having a salad, dress with oil such as extra virgin olive oil or rapeseed oil and add 'extras' such as avocado, olives, nuts and seeds or croutons.
- Add a source of fat or sugar to breakfast cereals such as porridge, nut butters, nuts and seeds, maple syrup, or honey.

The foods suggested on this page are dairy free but are not necessarily low histamine



Be cautious about adding new foods - try things in tiny amounts, one at a time



Nourishing drinks

Nourishing drinks can be useful to supplement your meals. There are some dairy-free high energy, high protein shake-style drinks available over the counter. Alternatively, speak to your GP if your BMI is very low or you have lost a lot of weight, then they may be able to prescribe some dairy-free nutritional supplements.

Ideas to add calories and protein to a dairy-free diet

- Aim to have 500ml/1 pint of plant-based milk fortified with calcium daily. Soya milk is the highest in protein, followed by oat milk. But if neither of these is suitable, then opt for alternatives such as other nuts, peas, or rice. (Soya not for children under 6 months)
- Have plant-based milky drinks such as milkshakes, milky coffees in between meals.
- Have dairy-free desserts after your meals, such as 'free from' rice puddings, yoghurts, or dairy-free custards/cream with fruit or a dairy-free crumble.
- Add extra dairy-free butter to cooked vegetables, mashed potatoes, or to a sandwich.

Recipe Ideas for Nourishing Drinks

Ideas for nourishing drinks that can be made at home:

1. Peanut Butter Banana Smoothie

Ingredients:

- 1 Banana
- 2 tbsp peanut butter (or other nut butter)
- 240ml plant-based milk, e.g., soya or oat
- 1 tbsp chia seeds
- 1 tbsp flaxseeds
- 1-2 Medjool dates (for sweetness)
- Optional: 1 scoop of plant-based protein powder

Blend until smooth



1. Oats and Berry Smoothie

Ingredients:

- 50 g oats (soaked in water or almond milk for 10-15 minutes)
- 150 g mixed berries (frozen or fresh)
- 1 tbsp almond butter (about 15 g)
- 240 ml almond milk (or any dairy-free milk)
- 1 tbsp ground flaxseeds or chia seeds (about 10 g)

Blend until smooth

1. Vanilla Coconut Milkshake

Ingredients:

- 240 ml full-fat coconut milk
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- 2 tbsp almond butter
- 1 tbsp chia seeds
- 1-2 tbsp maple syrup

Blend until smooth.

HELPFUL TIP
Do breathing exercises before eating to trigger a parasympathetic state. This helps with digestion!

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Calcium on a Dairy Free Diet

Calcium is important for strong bones and teeth, as well as healthy muscle and nerve function. Most adults need around 700mg a day (more if you have certain medical conditions such as coeliac disease). If you are unsure about how much you need due to certain medical conditions, then please speak with a Health Professional to get individualised advice.



If you're following a dairy-free diet, you can try to add some of the foods below to your daily meals. You could include around two portions a day, depending on what works best for your body:

- 500ml calcium-fortified plant-based milk (600mg of calcium)
- 100g calcium-set firm tofu (400mg calcium)
- 150g calcium fortified plant-based yoghurt (180mg calcium)
- 2 slices of soya and linseed bread with extra calcium (222mg calcium)



Other dairy-free foods that contain smaller amounts of calcium include tahini, dried figs, green leafy vegetables, and almonds. (1)

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