MAST CELL ACTION

Unwanted Weight Gain with MCAS

Nourishing Health and Happiness with MCAS

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Patient Information Forum



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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.

Unwanted Weight Gain and MCAS

Many people with Mast Cell Activation Syndrome (MCAS) find that they struggle with unwanted weight gain. This may be due to some of the following reasons:

1 Chronic inflammation and the release of chemical mediators like histamine and prostaglandins can disrupt hormones involved in appetite, metabolism and fat storage (1, 2).

2 Symptoms such as fatigue, pain and gastrointestinal upset or coexisting conditions may limit activity levels and make it harder to exercise regularly.

3 Dietary restrictions used to control symptoms can sometimes lead to an unbalanced intake - such as relying on higher-calorie "safe" foods.

4 Medications commonly prescribed for MCAS (like antihistamines or steroids) can also contribute to weight gain or fluid retention (3).

These factors combined mean weight changes with MCAS are often not a reflection of willpower but of complex biological processes.

Often medical support is needed to stabilise mast cells in order to encourage weight loss, however some of the following tips may also help (4).

Tips to support maintaining a healthy weight with MCAS

- Focus on balance, not restriction
- Prioritise balanced meals where possible with a source of protein, healthy fat and tolerated carbohydrates at each sitting. This helps you feel fuller for longer and can reduce energy crashes that lead to cravings.
- Aim for half a plate of vegetables, ¼ of protein e.g. chicken/fish/beans and pulses, and a ¼ of carbohydrates.



Tips to support maintaining a healthy weight with MCAS

- Keep a food and symptom diary
- Tracking what you eat, how you feel and your activity level can help identify "safe" healthier foods and patterns that support your goals without triggering MCAS symptoms.
- Plan gentle, regular movement
- Even light activity (short walks, gentle stretching, chair pilates) can support metabolism and mood. If symptoms limit exercise, start with what feels manageable and build up gradually.
- Stay hydrated
- Dehydration can sometimes feel like hunger and worsen fatigue. Drink tolerated fluids regularly throughout the day.
- Get enough rest and manage stress
- Poor sleep and high stress can increase mast cell activation and disrupt appetite hormones (5). Good sleep hygiene, relaxation techniques, or support from a health professional can help.
- Work with a specialist
- A dietitian experienced in MCAS can help you create a personalised eating plan that supports both symptom control and healthy weight.



References For Unwanted Weight Gain

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