

Fruits and vegetables may slow amyotrophic lateral sclerosis

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An MRI with increased signal in the posterior part of the internal capsule which can be tracked to the motor cortex consistent with the diagnosis of ALS. Credit: Frank Gaillard/Wikipedia

New research at Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health reveals that foods like fruits and vegetables that are high in antioxidant nutrients and carotenoids are associated with better function in amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) patients around the time of diagnosis. This is among the first studies to evaluate diet in association with ALS function and the first to show that healthy nutrients and antioxidants are associated with better ALS functioning. The findings are published online in *JAMA Neurology*.

ALS, also known as Lou Gehrig's Disease, is a severe neurodegenerative disorder that causes atrophy, paralysis, and eventually respiratory failure. Median survival for ALS patients ranges from 20 to 48 months, although 10 percent to 20 percent of patients can live longer than 10 years.

Jeri W. Nieves, PhD, associate professor of Epidemiology, and co-authors examined the links between nutritional intake and severity of ALS for patients who had ALS symptoms for 18 months or less. The study, which relied on nutrient intake reported using a food questionnaire, followed 302 participants recruited at 16 clinical centers throughout the U.S. The researchers used a validated measure of ALS severity and respiratory function.

"It appears that nutrition plays a role both in triggering the disease and why it progresses," said Dr. Nieves. "For this reason, ALS patients should eat foods high in antioxidants and carotenes, as well as high fiber grains, fish, and poultry."

The researchers also found that milk and lunch meats were associated with lower measures of function, or more severe disease. Two different statistical analyses by Dr. Nieves both indicate that diet may help minimize the severity of ALS and point to the role of oxidative stress in ALS severity.

"The foods and nutrients that may help reduce the severity of ALS are very similar to the recommendation to prevent many other chronic diseases," noted Dr. Nieves.

"Our cross-sectional study relied on a food questionnaire and those may not always represent a true daily diet," cautioned Dr. Nieves. "However, those responsible for nutritional care of the patient with ALS should consider promoting fruits and vegetables since they are high in antioxidants and carotenes. Future studies will look at follow-up-data on both dietary intake and progression of ALS."

Provided by Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health

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