

GENERAL INFORMATION

Parkinson's and Diet



Parkinson's
Disease Society

The **Parkinson's Disease Society of the United Kingdom (PDS)** works with people who have Parkinson's, their families and carers, and health and social care professionals. The mission of the PDS is the conquest of Parkinson's and the alleviation of the distress it causes through research, education, welfare and communication. The work of the PDS includes:

- research into the cause, cure and prevention of Parkinson's, and improvements in treatments, as well as welfare research;
- a freephone Helpline staffed by nurses offering advice and support;
- information on all aspects of Parkinson's including drug treatments, surgery, therapies, social and health care rights, benefits, insurance, employment, driving, holidays, respite care etc;
- a wide range of information sheets, booklets, audio tapes and videos for people with Parkinson's, families and carers, as well as people working in Parkinson's;
- a comprehensive programme of continuing and professional education for people working in all areas of Parkinson's;
- a national network of staff, branches and support groups around the UK which offer local information, support, and social activities.

For further information please contact:

Parkinson's Disease Society

215 Vauxhall Bridge Road, London SW1V 1EJ

Tel 020 7931 8080 **Fax** 020 7233 9908

Helpline: telephone (free) 0808 800 0303; textphone (Minicom) 020 7963 9380 (available Monday-Friday, 9.30am-5.30pm)

E-mail: enquiries@parkinsons.org.uk

Website: www.parkinsons.org.uk

There are local PDS branches throughout the UK; please call 020 7932 1306 for details.

**Parkinson's Disease Society of the United Kingdom. Registered Charity No. 258197.
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Registered Office: 215 Vauxhall Bridge Road, London SW1V 1EJ.**

Dear Friend

Thank you for contacting the Parkinson's Disease Society of the United Kingdom (PDS). We hope that you find this booklet helpful.

The PDS was established in 1969 and now has over 28,000 members and more than 300 branches, support groups and special interest groups throughout the UK. We provide support, advice and information to people with Parkinson's, their carers, families and friends and to health and social care professionals involved in management and care. The Society is a registered charity.

Each year the PDS spends more than £2 million on funding and research into the cause, cure and prevention of Parkinson's, and improvements in available treatments. The Society also develops models of good practice in service provision, such as Parkinson's Disease Nurse Specialists and respite care, and campaigns for changes that will improve the lives of people affected by Parkinson's.

Parkinson's affects people in very different ways. Your attitude to life is very important. If you have Parkinson's, try not to be discouraged or depressed if you find your condition slows you down, or makes certain routine activities more difficult. The advice of the PDS is to keep working at your own pace, and retain as many of your leisure activities as you can. Keep yourself as active and healthy as possible.

The PDS is here to help you. If you would like further information, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Parkinson's Disease Society of the United Kingdom



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Introduction

Getting the right nourishment is an important part of looking after your health. If you have Parkinson's you may need to take a little extra care.

This booklet provides advice on how to get the right balance of nutrients from the different food groups. It provides information and advice about particular problems that people with Parkinson's may experience, such as constipation, changes in weight and appetite, and difficulty in swallowing. It also looks at some questions people ask about food in relation to drugs and Parkinson's.

Finally it also tells you where to find further help, should you require it.

The Balance of Good Health

What should I eat?

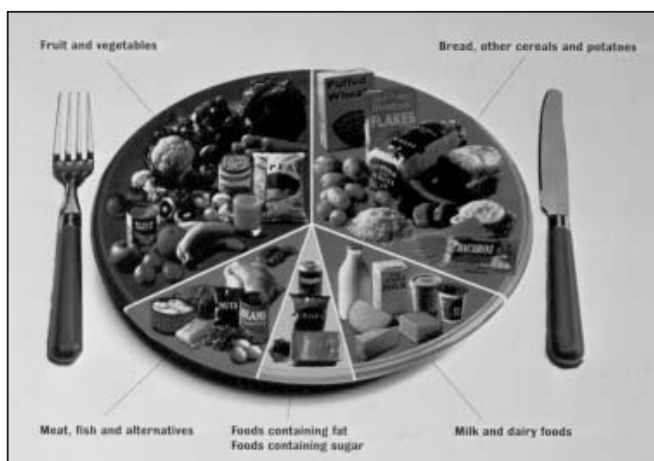


Illustration 'The Balance of Good Health' from *Enjoy Healthy Eating*, reprinted with kind permission of the Health Education Authority.

Enjoy a wide variety of foods each day. Use 'the balance of good health' (shown above) to plan regular meals. Choose foods from the different groups each day to make sure you are as eating as healthily as possible.



Food Groups

- **Starchy foods**

Each of your meals and snacks should have starchy food, such as bread, potatoes, rice, chapattis, yams, pasta, noodles, oats, crackers and breakfast cereals.

- **Fruit and vegetables**

Aim for three to five servings of fruit and vegetables each day. Choose from fresh, frozen or canned fruit and vegetables.

- **Dairy products**

Aim for three to five servings of milk and dairy foods each day. A serving is a third of a pint of milk, one small pot of yoghurt, or a small matchbox portion of cheese.

- **Meat, fish and alternatives**

Aim for two to three servings each day from this group. Choose from red or white meat, white or oily fish, eggs, beans and pulses, cooked as desired.

- **Fatty and sugary foods**

These foods can be eaten in moderation. (*See section 'A Healthy Weight' if weight control is a problem.*)

- **Fluids**

It is very important to drink plenty of fluids. Aim for eight to ten cups (six to eight mugs) each day, of water, fruit juice, squash, tea, coffee, milk etc. Eating more fruits that are juicy, such as melon, will also help increase your fluid intake.

- **Alcohol**

Unless you have been advised by your doctor not to drink

alcohol, a small amount of alcohol, e.g. sherry, wine or beer, does no harm and may be beneficial, especially if it encourages normal social life.

How often should I eat?

Try to have three meals a day, or four smaller ones. In each meal include foods from the different groups.

A Healthy Weight

It is important for everybody to maintain an optimum body weight. Being overweight, or more commonly in Parkinson's underweight, can have effects on your health.

It is easy to gain weight when you become less active, and are perhaps eating the same amount of food. However, it is still important to eat a variety of different foods.

How can I keep to a healthy weight?

Below are some tips on how to reduce the energy content of your diet sensibly:

- Try not to eat fried foods daily – the same food can be grilled or cooked some other way, without adding fat – bake, steam, microwave.
- Cakes, biscuits, and pastries all have a lot of sugar and fat in them. Try and cut down the number of times you have these.
- Sweets and chocolate also contain a lot of calories. Avoid snacking on these between meals.
- Take care with sugary drinks such as cola, cordials etc. There will usually be a 'sugar free' or 'low calorie' choice that would be suitable.



It is still important to have three healthy meals a day to provide all the nutrients and goodness you need.

If you would like help on dieting, speak to your Doctor, or ask to see a State Registered Dietician.

I find I am underweight, what can I do?

You may find you are underweight, and have difficulty putting weight on. Sometimes weight loss can be due to practical problems to do with food preparation and keeping your food hot while you are eating (see section '*Food Shopping and Preparation*' for tips). Or it can be to do with poor swallowing (see section '*Advice on Eating and Swallowing*').

If you are underweight the following advice may be useful, or ask to see a State Registered Dietician for assistance.

- Try to have three meals per day and two to three snacks in between. (See section '*Eating Plan*'.) It is important to try and eat every two to three hours during the day, or at least have a nutritious drink e.g. Build-up, Complan (see below).
- Full fat pasteurised milk is an excellent drink and can be used in cooking. To make it even better add three to four tablespoons of milk powder to a pint of full cream milk, and use at least one pint every day. (NB While milk is excellent, be aware it can thicken the saliva.)
- Make the most of adding 'extras' to foods, such as extra cream, butter, or sugar/honey. These will make the food more energy dense, and tasty!

There are some special drinks that you can buy in chemists or larger shops. 'Complan' and 'Build-up', for example, are powders that mix with milk to make a nutritious drink or soup. They are also available as ready-prepared drinks.

Constipation

Many people with Parkinson's find constipation a problem.

This can be helped by:

- increasing your fluid intake;
- taking exercise;
- increasing your intake of fibre-rich foods.

How does fibre help?

Fibre works by absorbing fluid as it moves through your bowel, forming a soft stool that can be passed more easily. (However, be careful, because too much bulk can increase constipation, especially if you don't drink enough. You require eight to 10 cups (or six to eight mugs) of fluid daily.)

How to increase your fibre intake

Fibre is found in cereal grains, seeds, nuts, fruit, vegetables and pulses, e.g. peas, beans and lentils. (Loose, extra bran which can be added on to your food, is *not* recommended: it can lead to bloating and can also reduce the absorption of vitamins and minerals.)

- Include high fibre varieties of foods, e.g. wholemeal bread, wholewheat pasta, brown rice. Recipes can be adapted to use some wholemeal flour instead of all white.
- Include a breakfast cereal containing wheat, wheatbran or oats e.g. Weetabix, porridge, Branflakes.
- Increase your intake of all kinds of vegetables: raw/cooked, fresh/frozen. Use more peas, beans or lentils.
- Increase your intake of fruit: fresh, stewed, tinned or dried e.g. bananas, oranges, prunes.



When increasing your intake of fibre it is important to do so gradually to avoid bloating or flatulence (wind). Introduce one new fibre food every three days.

Fluids

How much fluid should I drink?

It is essential to drink plenty throughout the day, to help the fibre to do its work.

Aim to take eight to 10 cups (six to eight mugs) every day. Any fluid is suitable e.g. water, fruit juice, milk, tea, coffee, squashes or fizzy drinks. (NB Fizzy drinks can make some people feel bloated.)

Eating Plan

What should I be eating?

Good nutrition in Parkinson's involves eating regularly, and eating a wide range of foods. A sample eating plan is given below. Choose from:

Breakfast:	Fruit or fruit juice; cereal and milk and sugar if desired; bread/toast with butter/margarine/preserves as desired; egg, bacon, sausage, cheese, beans etc. as desired; drink e.g. tea, coffee
Midday meal:	Meat, fish, eggs or cheese or alternative; potato, rice, pasta or bread/toast; vegetables; milk pudding, yoghurt, custard or fruit drink

- Evening meal:** Soup or fruit juice; meat, fish, eggs; beans or lentils, potato, rice, pasta, chappati or bread; salad or vegetables; milk pudding, yoghurt, pie & custard or fruit drink
- Between meals:** Have a drink between meals as well as with them, e.g. tea, coffee, soup, fruit juice, squash, milk, water etc. Snacks can be fruit, biscuits, sandwiches, crackers and spread, buns, scones, breakfast cereals and milk etc.

Medication

When should I take my Parkinson's medications?

The exact timing of taking your Parkinson's drugs will always depend on your individual medication. You should discuss this in full with your Doctor or Parkinson's Disease Nurse Specialist.

Food, particularly protein, can interfere with the absorption of antiparkinsonian drugs, particularly levodopa. The timing of taking medications with respect to food should be discussed with your Doctor, or you can ask to be referred to a State Registered Dietician.

Sipping a cold drink such as water, squash or juice helps with swallowing tablets. However, it is advised that you don't take your Parkinson's medication with milk.

(See section 'The Role of Protein'.)



The Role of Protein

Can protein affect my medication?

In some people, protein (which is found mainly in meat, fish, eggs, cheese, yoghurt, nuts, beans and pulses) seems to interfere with the effectiveness of their levodopa medication. These people may therefore benefit from taking their levodopa 45 minutes before meals (ideally with a carbohydrate food like a cracker or biscuit).

Tests restricting the intake of daytime protein have been tried by people with serious Parkinson's symptoms and, in some cases, they have shown an improvement in their response to levodopa.

A protein redistribution diet, whereby most of the daily recommended dietary protein is taken in the evening, therefore may be worth considering if you are experiencing major difficulties. However, do *not reduce* the amount of protein you eat, it is vital for the body to renew itself and fight infection, and reduction can bring dangerous weight-loss.

If you do wish to review the timing of your protein intake, please first discuss it with your Doctor, or ask to see a State Registered Dietician.

Are antacids ok to take?

Antacids (e.g. Rennie or Milk of Magnesia, which are used to relieve discomfort in disorders of the digestive system) should preferably not be taken at the same time as other drugs since they may impair absorption.

Vitamins, Minerals and Antioxidants

Eating a well-balanced diet, as recommended in this booklet, will provide adequate levels of the vitamins and minerals for most people. Food contains fibre and other valuable nutrients as well as vitamins and minerals. So, if you feel you need more of a particular vitamin or mineral, it is generally advised that you eat more of the relevant foods, rather than buy expensive vitamin and mineral supplements.

Some vitamins, when taken in large doses can cause severe side effects. If you are taking supplements with high doses of vitamins and minerals or need further advice on this matter generally, it is highly recommended that you see a State Registered Dietician or your Doctor.

Vitamin B6

In the past, Vitamin B6 tended to accelerate the conversion of the anti-parkinsonian drug levodopa, turning it to dopamine before it reached, and could be used by, the brain. Today, however, most levodopa medications contain an inhibitor of this conversion, so levodopa is converted to dopamine where it should be – in the brain. So the level of Vitamin B6 in a normal diet should not be a concern, although it would be wise to avoid excessive amounts or supplements permitting normal intake of bananas, unless prescribed by your Doctor.

Vitamin E

An initial pilot study suggested that Vitamin E might delay the progression of Parkinson's, but a later more detailed study involving a much greater number of patients failed to confirm this.



Antioxidants

Oxidation is a normal process which occurs in all cells of the body. A substance produced from this process is known to cause damage and play a part in the development of diseases such as heart disease, cancer and Parkinson's.

Antioxidants (known as free radical scavengers) are a group of vitamins and minerals that can help lessen the damage caused by oxidation. Currently there is no evidence that they will slow the progression of Parkinson's or provide an increased effect of drugs. Again, providing you are consuming a well-balanced diet, your antioxidant vitamin intake will be covered. If you want to take additional antioxidant vitamins e.g. A, C, and E; and/or have concerns, ask to see a State Registered Dietician via your Doctor.

See PDS Information Sheet: Antioxidants (FS67) for further details.

What about Co-Enzyme Q10?

Co-enzyme Q10, which is naturally present in very small amounts in a wide range of foods – particularly protein foods, has potent anti-oxidant properties. Studies of people who are receiving large doses as a supplement, suggest that at present CoQ10 is not recommended as a treatment for Parkinson's.

See PDS Information Sheet Coenzyme Q10 (FS74) for further details.

Food Supplements

Do I need to take food supplements?

The same advice as for vitamin and mineral supplements applies to food supplements, if you are a healthy weight for your height then food supplements may not be necessary.

However, if:

- you are not managing to eat enough food, for example due to nausea, loss of appetite, increased movement.
- or if you are underweight, then food supplements can be useful to boost your nutritional intake, or they can be drunk as an easier alternative to food.

Drinks such as Complan and Build-Up can be found in your local chemist, supermarket or health store. Other food supplements such as Ensure Plus, Fortisip, Entera, Enlive or Fresubin may be available on prescription from your Doctor.



Food Shopping and Preparation

The way you buy, store, prepare and cook food may need a little rethinking. It is recommended that you seek advice from an Occupational Therapist who can advise you on all aspects of food shopping and preparation including kitchen and shopping aids. **Here are some tips:**

- Plan meals in advance, making a shopping list of all the ingredients you need.
- When planning meals, decide how long you can stand at a cooker without becoming tired.
- Consider buying ready prepared foods e.g. frozen vegetables (they are just as nutritious as fresh) and tinned fish, meat or beans. Ready meals can save time, your energy, gas, electricity and food wastage.
- Keep a wide supply of food in your store cupboard and freezer.
- At supermarkets, look out for special trolleys designed to make shopping easier for people with disabilities.
- If possible, consider buying a microwave; they are very versatile and take a only few minutes to cook meals and heat up drinks.
- If you like a nap in the afternoon, keep hot water in a flask on a tray with a tea bag, milk, sugar etc. Drinking regularly helps to keep you warm.
- Contact your local PDS branch which can tell you about shopping services/volunteers etc.
- You may be entitled to meals on wheels or home delivery of frozen meals; contact the home care organiser of your Social Services/Work Department.

Dishes and Cutlery

Should I buy special utensils?

A variety of adapted utensils for eating and drinking are available and may be worth considering (*see 'Further Information and Resources for contact details'*). However, it is strongly recommended that you seek the advice of an Occupational Therapist before going to the expense of buying specialised items:

Cutlery

Specialised cutlery is available in various shapes and sizes. Cutlery with enlarged or weighted handles, or handles which are angled rather than straight may be useful.

Cups and Mugs

Use a large mug for drinks, but only half full. Two-handled cups can help improve grip and reduce the chance of spillage. Special 'tumble-not' mugs are available with wide, non-slip bases and tall necks. (The PDS supplies these.)

Plates

A 'stay-warm plate' might be useful if it takes you a long time to eat, or you could have smaller, but more frequent meals. A damp cloth placed under a plate will stop it from slipping, or special mats can be used. High lipped plates are available which prevent spillage and make it easier to draw food onto the fork or spoon; similarly plate guards can be bought which clip on to your usual plates.

Equipment

Equipment is also available to help with opening jars and bottles.

See PDS Information Sheet Equipment (FS59) for further details.



Advice on Eating and Swallowing

Ensure you are comfortable at meal times. To make it easier to eat, it may be helpful to:

- Take your time. Eat in a comfortable, quiet environment. However, if you feel you are taking too long, and food is getting cold, consider eating smaller more frequent meals, or easier foods.
- Try eating in the recommended position – sitting upright in a chair with both feet on the floor and the arm you are not using resting on the table.
- Try planning your meals for when your medication is working. Avoid attempting large meals when you are 'off'.
- Some people feel their throats tense up while eating, and food 'sticks in the throat'. Try yawning before the meal to relax the throat.

What can I do to aid swallowing?

Some people find certain foods difficult to chew or swallow, or have difficulty in opening their mouths. If this is the case, you may consider a semi-solid diet. However, before doing so you should speak to a Speech and Language Therapist, your Doctor or a State Registered Dietician, who will be able to advise you; this is because not all swallowing problems are to do with Parkinson's and it is vital you confirm the cause of your problem before changing your diet. They can also advise on the best consistency/texture of food and liquid for you.

Semi-solid foods are usually easier to swallow than foods with mixed textures or very hard/dry foods.

Some tips on easier swallowing:

- Try slightly thicker creamy soups rather than thin watery ones, or those with 'bits' in.
- Meat that is tough or chewy can be difficult, try moistening with a gravy or sauce or try fish which is usually softer (though be aware of very bony fish).
- Try mashed potato, pasta or noodles as a change from bread.
- White bread can get stuck around the mouth; try wholemeal bread, have it with a dip, sauce or smooth peanut butter.
- Try soft moist biscuits such as sponge fingers or mini rolls rather than drier crackers and toast.
- Having a drink with your meal makes chewing and swallowing easier. Sipping iced water particularly, including before beginning to eat, may help the 'strength' of your swallow.
- Good posture and a comfortable position while eating will also aid swallowing.
- Try taking smaller mouthfuls.
- If you wear dentures make sure they fit properly.



Should I try a puree diet?

If swallowing is extremely difficult, again, seek advice from a Speech and Language Therapist, your Doctor or a State Registered Dietician to discuss your problem. They may suggest a puree diet.

Some tips on a puree diet:

- If foods are being liquidised or pureed, always use a milk-based sauce or gravy rather than water. This will increase the nutrients and energy of the meal.
- Do not use baby foods; although they may be the right texture, they are not nutritionally adequate for adults.
- Thickening agents can be added to liquidised or pureed food to add back some of the texture. Suitable thickeners include milk powder, instant potato powder, custard powder or plain yoghurt. Other thickening agents can be bought or are available from your Doctor, e.g. Thick 'n' Easy, Thixo D, Vitaquick and Nutilis. Moulds are also available which allow specially thickened food to retain their 'normal' food appearance.

Speech and Language Therapists, Occupational Therapists and State Registered Dieticians, can also advise further on diet, utensils and eating techniques.

See PDS Information Sheet Swallowing Problems and Parkinson's (FS52) for further details.

Further Information and Resources

Further information and advice on Parkinson's and related subjects is available from the Parkinson's Disease Society, see the inside front cover of this booklet for contact details.

The PDS produces a wide range of booklets, information sheets and leaflets about living with Parkinson's. These include the following resources related to eating and diet:

Free Booklets (code number in brackets):

Looking after your Bladder and Bowels in Parkinsonism (B60)

Parkinson's and Dental Health (B45)

The Drug Treatment of Parkinson's Disease (B13)

Meeting Your Health and Social Care Needs (B49)

Occupational Therapy and Parkinson's (leaflet) (B47)

Free Information Sheets (code number in brackets):

Antioxidants and Parkinson's (FS67)

Coenzyme Q10 (FS74)

Equipment (FS59)

Drooling and Parkinson's (FS22)

Fava Beans (FS55)

Motor Fluctuations (FS73)

Speech & Language Therapy (FS7)

Swallowing Problems and Parkinson's (FS52)



To order any of these, or to request a full list of all PDS products (which also includes videos, tapes, utensils and merchandise) please contact the PDS's distributor, Sharward Services Ltd (address follows). NB Although the items listed above are free, postage must be paid. For a single factsheet, please include a stamp-addressed envelope. For one to five publications, please enclose a cheque made out to PDS Sales Ltd for £1.05.

To order PDS publications, please contact:
Sharward Services Ltd, Westerfield Business Centre,
Main Road, Westerfield, Ipswich, Suffolk IP6 9AB
Tel: 01473 212115
Fax: 01473 212114
Email: services@sharward.co.uk.

What about specialised equipment?

For advice on where to obtain specialised utensils, please contact the **Disabled Living Foundation**,
380-384 Harrow Road, London W9 2HU
Helpline Tel (local rate charge): 0845 130 9177
Textphone: 020 7432 8009
(available 10am-1pm, Monday-Friday)
Email: advice@dlf.org.uk
Website: www.dlf.org.uk.

The Parkinson's Disease Society produces mugs which are designed to make holding and drinking easier for people with Parkinson's. To find out more about these please contact Sharward Services (details above).

Who Can Help

If you require more specialist advice about food and nutrition, ask your Doctor to refer you to a **State Registered Dietician** at your local Doctor's surgery or at your local hospital. They are health professionals trained in nutrition who can provide advice and information on all aspects of diet.

If your area has a **Parkinson's Disease Nurse Specialist**, he or she will be able to provide further help and advice on diet. You can be referred by your Doctor. These Nurses are specially trained in the treatment and management of Parkinson's.

Speech and Language Therapists can assess and treat problems associated with speech and swallowing difficulties and can help by suggesting ways for you to eat more comfortably and safely. You can usually refer yourself directly to your local Speech and Language Therapy Department at the local general or district hospital.

Occupational Therapists assess people's homes and work places, and then devise ways to make these places more manageable and less hazardous. This can help to maximise independence and reduce frustration. Sometimes a new way of arranging the kitchen, or approaching a task differently can make a real improvement.



Parkinson's
Disease Society

PDS Publications Response Form

To ensure that the PDS is providing as good a service as possible, we like to find out what readers think of publications. The Society would be extremely grateful if you would take the time to complete this form, and post it to **Publications Department, Parkinson's Disease Society, 215 Vauxhall Bridge Road, London SW1V 1EJ**. Thank you.

The name of this publication: **PARKINSON'S AND DIET**

Are you: (please circle/highlight)

Someone with Parkinson's: I have had Parkinson's for _____ years

A carer for someone with Parkinson's: I've been a carer for _____ years

A relative of someone with Parkinson's

A friend of someone with Parkinson's

A professional working in Parkinson's; I am a _____

Where did you get the publication from? (please circle)

Sharward Services Information Day PDS Branch Hospital

Doctor's Practice Pharmacy/Chemist PDS Website Other

How useful have you found the publication?

(please circle a number: 1 is not very useful, 7 is very useful)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Which section did you find most helpful? _____

Which section did you find least helpful? _____

Are there any topics you felt should have been covered but weren't?



Have you found the publication easy to read / use? _____

Any other comments on this publication? _____

Is there another related topic which you think the PDS should provide a booklet/information sheet on?

Many thanks for your help. You do not have to fill out your details below, but if you do so, it will help us give a better service in future.

Name _____

Date of Birth _____

Address _____

_____ Postcode _____

Tel _____ E-mail _____

Are you a PDS member? (please circle) Yes No

If not, would you like information on membership? Yes No

**Please cut out your completed form and post it to:
Publications Department, Parkinson's Disease Society,
215 Vauxhall Bridge Road, London SW1V 1EJ.
Or fax it to: 020 7233 9908. Thank you for your help.**

The Parkinson's Disease Society of the United Kingdom is registered under the Data Protection Act and all information you supply through this response form will be treated under the terms of the Act. The PDS will hold this data on its own database, and will not release it to any commercial organisation. The information supplied will be used for monitoring services.



Thanks to:

Dieticians In Neurological Therapy (DINT),
an interest group of the British Dietetic Association

and

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a specialist group of the British Dietetic Association

Thanks also to:

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Speech & Language Therapist & PDS Education Manager

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