Adapting the Mediterranean Diet for African Caribbean Cuisines

Maintaining a healthy diet is crucial for managing Parkinson's disease (PD) and supporting overall health. The Mediterranean diet, known for its heart and brain health benefits, can be easily adapted to suit an African Caribbean diet while supporting PD management. Here's how to adapt the Mediterranean diet for an African Caribbean style of eating.

Focus on Healthy Fats

What to Eat: Use olive oil or avocado oil where possible, as these are healthier alternatives to fats like coconut oil, palm oil, bacon fat or butter, which are high in saturated fats. Avocados, also rich in healthy fats, can replace oil in some dishes.

Tip: For dishes like ackee and saltfish, try to use less coconut oil, palm oil, bacon fat or butter, and instead sauté ingredients in olive oil. When cooking with oils like coconut oil, use them sparingly.

Choose Whole Grains and Starchy Tubers

What to Eat: Substitute refined grains with whole grains like brown rice, whole wheat flour, quinoa, or millet. Incorporate starchy tubers such as sweet potatoes, cassava (yucca), dasheen, and yams, which are naturally packed with fibre.

Examples: Use boiled yams or plantains in place of fried versions, and try baking or grilling these starchy foods to retain nutrients without excess fat.



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Emphasise Plant-Based Proteins

What to Eat: Continue to enjoy legumes like black-eyed peas, red kidney beans, pigeon peas, and chickpeas. These plant-based proteins are essential in African Caribbean diets and align with the Mediterranean focus on legumes.

Tip: Include lentils or black-eyed peas in stews and soups, and consider curried chickpeas or lentil salads for additional variety.

Eat Plenty of Vegetables

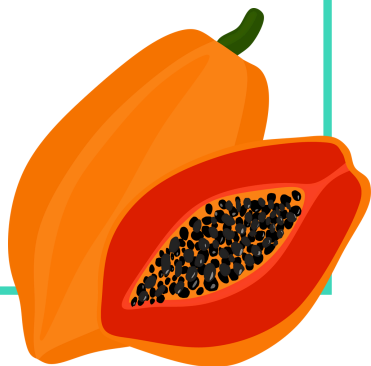
What to Eat: African Caribbean diets already include a variety of vegetables like callaloo, okra, spinach, pumpkin, and green bananas. Aim to increase your vegetable intake by including them in every meal and try to eat at least five portions of fruits and vegetables daily.

Tip: Add vegetables to rice dishes, soups, and stews, and try steaming or grilling vegetables instead of frying them to preserve nutrients and flavour.

Include Fresh Fruits

What to Eat: Fresh tropical fruits like mango, papaya, guava, pineapple, and plantains are packed with vitamins, fibre, and antioxidants. These fruits can be a part of your snacks or desserts.

Tip: Have fruit as a snack or make a fruit salad with lime for added flavour. If you enjoy fruit drinks like sorrel, reduce or eliminate the added sugar.



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Include Fish and Lean Proteins

What to Eat: Fish like mackerel, snapper and sardines are rich in omega-3 fatty acids, which are important for brain health and reducing inflammation. Lean proteins like chicken and turkey should also be included in moderation. Aim to eat less red meats and try to avoid processed meats such as sausages, paté and bacon.

Tip: Grill, bake, or steam fish and chicken instead of frying them. For a Mediterranean twist, marinate jerk fish or chicken with herbs and olive oil before grilling.

Use Herbs and Spices for Flavour

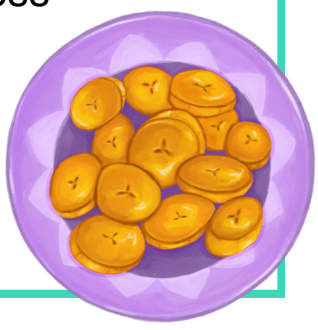
What to Eat: African Caribbean herbs and spices like thyme, allspice, ginger, scotch bonnet peppers, curry powder, and cumin are rich in antioxidants and have anti-inflammatory properties.

Tip: Continue to use these spices to flavour your food while reducing the use of salt. Instead of high-sodium seasonings, opt for fresh herbs and spices to enhance flavour.

Reduce Processed and Fried Foods

What to Eat Less Often: Reduce how often you eat fried foods like fried dumplings, plantains, and salted meats. Processed meats and “ultra-processed” snacks, such as Caribbean patties, should be eaten less frequently.

Tip: Try baking, grilling, or air-frying instead of frying. Swap fried plantains for baked or grilled plantains, and use whole grains instead of refined flours when making dumplings.



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Manage Salt and Sugar Intake

What to Avoid: Excessive salt can contribute to high blood pressure, which is a higher risk among African Caribbean populations. Limit the use of processed seasonings and opt for herbs, spices, and fresh ingredients instead.

Tip: Reduce the salt in dishes like jerk chicken by using natural herbs and spices, and try using lime or vinegar for added flavour instead of salt. And instead of saltfish, choose fresh cod where you can. Or otherwise, do make sure to boil your saltfish in lots of unsalted water for a long while before adding it to your dishes.

Stay Hydrated

What to Drink: Stay hydrated with water, coconut water, or herbal teas. Limit sugary drinks and alcohol.

Tip: Instead of sugary drinks, opt for fresh lime water or unsweetened herbal teas. If you enjoy beverages like sorrel, prepare them with less or no sugar.



Consider Supplements if Needed

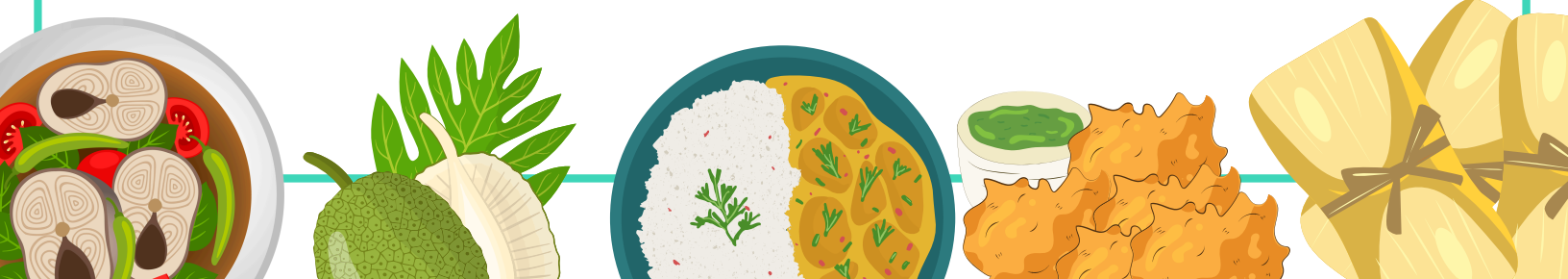
What to Watch for: If you follow a largely plant-based diet, you may benefit from additional nutrients like vitamin B12, omega-3, and iron.

Tip: Incorporate fortified plant-based milks or chia seeds for omega-3, and consult with your healthcare provider about taking vitamin B12 or iron supplements if necessary.

Typical high salt/fat dishes

The following are a list of some popular African Caribbean dishes that may contain too much salt and saturated fat. Consider if you can reduce how much salt is used in these dishes, and whether you can switch to using olive oil to cook these meals.

Antigua, Montserrat, Nevis	Fish soup, pepper pot soup
Barbados	Jug-jug black pudding
Belize	Conch fritters, rice and chicken, tamales, refried beans and iswa
Dominica	Tannia, mountain chicken
Grenada	Callaloo, lambi souse
Guyana	Mellagee
Jamaica	Brown george, roasted breadfruit, saltfish and ackee
St. Vincent & the Grenadines	Stewed shark
British Virgin Islands	Saltfish and rice, fish chowder, conch salad
Trinidad and Tobago	Kachouri, palouri, pelau, pakoras
Guadeloupe and Martinique	Pate en pot, mechoui



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Practical Meal Ideas

- **Breakfast:** Oats with almond milk, avocado, and a boiled egg, or ackee with boiled green bananas.
- **Lunch:** Brown rice and peas with grilled jerk chicken and a side of callaloo or steamed vegetables.
- **Snack:** Fresh fruit like mango or pineapple, or baked plantains.
- **Dinner:** Grilled fish like snapper or mackerel, with a side of roasted sweet potatoes or boiled yams, and sauteed spinach or callaloo.
- **Dessert:** Fresh fruit salad or baked tropical fruits like pineapple with a sprinkle of cinnamon.

Adapting the Mediterranean diet to an African Caribbean eating style can help manage Parkinson's disease while maintaining the cultural flavours and dishes you enjoy. Focus on including whole grains, lean proteins, plenty of vegetables, fruits, and healthy fats while reducing salty, fried and processed foods.

Making these small, sustainable changes can have a significant impact on your health and well-being.

If you have specific dietary concerns, talk to your dietitian to ensure your meals meet your nutritional needs while managing Parkinson's disease.

