Adapting the Mediterranean Diet for South Asian Cuisines

The Mediterranean diet is known for its potential to support brain health, reduce inflammation, and improve overall well-being, all of which are important for managing Parkinson's disease. If you mainly eat a South Asian Cuisine, it's easy to adapt the Mediterranean diet to suit your cultural preferences while still benefiting from its core principles.

Here's how you can adjust your current eating habits to align with the Mediterranean diet, tailored for those who eat South Asian cuisines.

Focus on Healthy Fats

What to Eat: Use olive oil as your primary cooking fat where possible. For traditional dishes, you can also use mustard oil. Fats like butter, ghee and palm oil are high in saturated fat. Try to limit the number of meals with these ingredients, and avoid adding butter or ghee to bread, chapattis or rice.

Tip: Replace deep-frying with grilling, steaming, or sautéing using olive oil to make dishes like tandoori vegetables or grilled paneer.

Choose Whole Grains

What to Eat: Opt for whole wheat (atta), brown rice, millets like ragi, jowar, and bajra instead of refined grains like white rice or maida (white flour). This could be using brown rice when making Poha (flattened or broken rice) or using wholegrain flours when making chapatti/roti, such as sorghum, or jowar flour. These are higher in minerals, fibre, protein, and antioxidants. It is also high in potassium, which helps you manage your blood pressure.

Examples: Swap white rice for brown rice or quinoa, and try making multigrain rotis instead of refined ones.

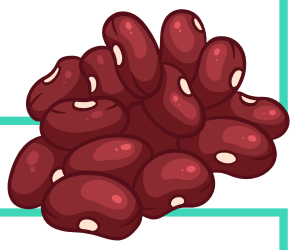


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Emphasise Plant-Based Proteins

What to Eat: Continue enjoying your traditional dal (lentils), chickpeas (chole), mung beans, and rajma (kidney beans). These are excellent sources of protein and fibre. Nuts and nut butter are also good additions.

Tip: Add beans, nuts and lentils to other meals for variety and extra protein, if needed.



Eat Plenty of Vegetables

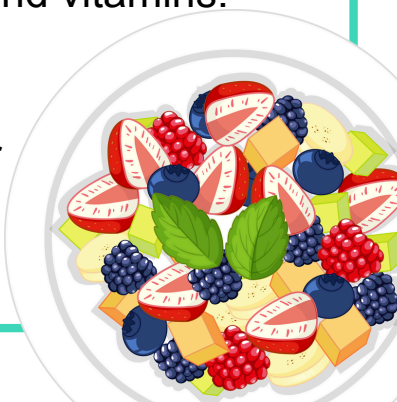
What to Eat: Fill half your plate with a variety of colourful vegetables like spinach (palak), okra (bhindi), aubergine (baingan), tomatoes, and cauliflower (gobi). Aim for a mix of leafy greens, cruciferous vegetables such as cabbage and brocolli, and other nutrient-rich options.

Tip: Use cooking methods like steaming or sautéing with spices like turmeric, cumin, and coriander to make your vegetables more flavourful while retaining nutrients.

Include Fresh Fruits

What to Eat: Fruits like mango, berries, papaya, guava, pomegranate, oranges, apples, and bananas are rich in antioxidants, fibre, and vitamins. Include these in your diet daily.

Tip: Make a fruit salad with chaat masala for a quick snack or have fresh fruit with breakfast to increase your daily intake.



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Dairy in Moderation

What to Eat: You can continue eating yoghurt (dahi) and paneer as part of your 2 portions of dairy a day in a balanced Mediterranean diet. These provide calcium and natural probiotics, which are helpful for bone, muscle and digestive health, which are especially important in Parkinson's.

Tip: Dairy foods like ghee, cream and butter are very high in saturated fats. Choose to only have these occasionally.

Add Fish and Lean Meats

What to Eat: For those who eat fish or meat, opt for grilled or baked fish, such as mackerel (bangda), sardines, or pomfret, which are rich in omega-3 fatty acids. Chicken and turkey are also good sources of lean protein.

Tip: Make tandoori fish or chicken kebabs using olive oil (and minimal butter or ghee) for a Mediterranean-friendly protein option.

Use Spices for Flavour and Health

What to Eat: Traditional South Asian spices like turmeric, cumin, coriander, ginger, and garlic are all packed with health benefits. Turmeric, in particular, has anti-inflammatory properties, which may be beneficial for managing Parkinson's symptoms.

Tip: Incorporate these spices regularly in your cooking to enhance flavour without needing added fats or sugars.



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Avoid Processed and Sugary Foods

What to eat less of: Try to eat less deep-fried snacks like samosas, pakoras, and pooris, as well as sugary sweets like gulab jamun and jalebi. These foods are considered to be “ultra processed” and are not recommended to have regularly.

Tip: When you crave something sweet, opt for fresh fruit or snacks like roasted chana or nuts.

Stay Hydrated

What to Drink: Drinks like coconut water, buttermilk (chaas), and herbal teas are great for hydration. It is important to reduce sugary drinks or high-sugar lassis.

Tip: Add fresh lime to your water for a refreshing drink that supports hydration without added sugars.



Consider Supplements if Needed

What to Watch for: If you follow a vegetarian or vegan diet, you might need to supplement with vitamin B12, omega-3, and iron. Flaxseeds, chia seeds, and walnuts are great plant-based sources of omega-3, while fortified plant-based drinks such as soya drink can provide calcium and vitamin D.

Tip: Talk to your healthcare provider about any supplements you may need, especially if you have dietary restrictions.

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Practical Meal Ideas

- **Breakfast:** Oats with soya milk and flaxseeds or millet upma with vegetables.
- **Lunch:** Chickpea and spinach curry with brown rice or whole wheat chapati.
- **Snack:** Roasted chana, fruit salad with chat masala, or mixed nuts.
- **Dinner:** Fish and vegetable-based curries with brown rice, or dal with quinoa.
- **Desserts:** Fresh fruit or rice pudding made with soya milk.

By incorporating these changes, you can adapt your South Asian cuisine to follow the principles of the Mediterranean diet. This can help you manage the symptoms of Parkinson's disease while still enjoying the flavours and traditions of your usual way of eating.

Small adjustments, like using healthy fats, increasing your intake of whole grains and vegetables, and being mindful of portion sizes, can make a big difference in your overall health and well-being.

If you have any specific dietary needs or concerns, talk to your dietitian to ensure your meals are tailored to meet your individual health goals.

