



# NUTRITION AND SCLERODERMA

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Knowing that scleroderma can manifest itself in several parts of the affected person's body (visible symptoms when the skin is affected and/or invisible symptoms when internal organs are affected), it is important to have the best nutritional intake to help in better coping with the symptoms of the disease.

Whether or not we are perfectly healthy, the food we eat is an integral part of a global approach to our health and can greatly influence our general well-being. It is in our best interest, especially when ill, to consume quality fuel that is adapted to the needs of our body.

Here are some of the principal symptoms of scleroderma and a few nutritional recommendations and useful advice to mitigate them.

## ACID REFLUX AND SCLERODERMA

For several people affected by scleroderma, acid reflux (or gastroesophageal) is a particularly bothersome, sometimes painful symptom of the disease.

### FIRST, WHAT IS GASTROESOPHAGEAL REFLUX?

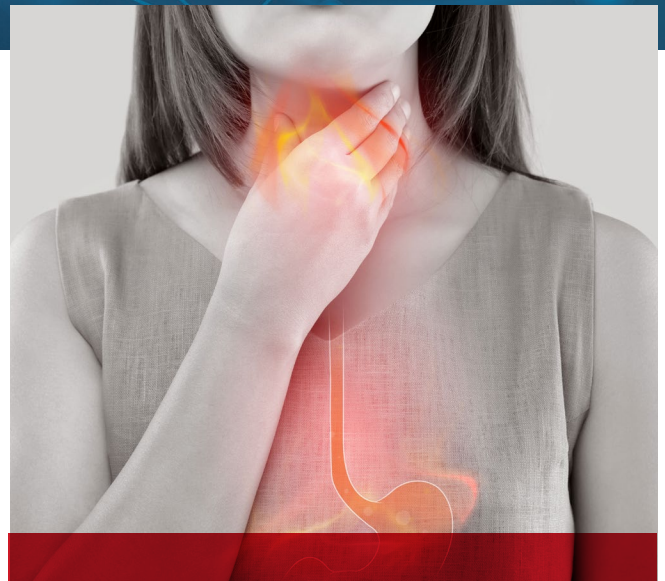
It is acid reflux from the stomach to the esophagus, due to a malfunctioning lower esophagus sphincter (a valve that serves as a protective barrier) which, having lost its tone, can no longer close. This dysfunction of the esophagus sphincter can cause complications, such as inflammation, ulcers in the esophagus, dental cavities due to loss of enamel caused by acid regurgitations.

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# GASTRIC REFLUX

Here are some tips that can help if you suffer from this symptom:

- ▶ maintain a healthy weight;
- ▶ considerably diminish, or even eliminate, certain foods such as: chocolate, coffee (caffeinated or decaf), alcohol, soft drinks, tomatoes, citrus, sugar, fried fatty foods, strong spices, white vinegar, mustard and mint;
- ▶ eat lots of vegetables, preferably raw or lightly steamed. At least half of our plate should consist of vegetables, one quarter of starchy foods, and one quarter of lean proteins;
- ▶ avoid eating two to three hours before laying down;
- ▶ have several small meals and snacks;
- ▶ eat slowly and chew properly;
- ▶ drink liquids at least a half-hour before or after the meal;
- ▶ avoid swallowing air (for example talking while eating, eating with your mouth open, drinking with a straw, drinking carbonated drinks, etc.);
- ▶ avoid chewing gum;
- ▶ if, on a special occasion, you are offered alcohol, don't drink on an empty stomach, as alcohol increases stomach acid and irritates the digestive system;
- ▶ avoid constipation by drinking a lot of water and by eating enough fibers (consult a nutritionist if needed).



Here is more advice that may help neutralize gastric acid:

- ▶ at the onset of the reflux, drink a tall glass of water to dilute the stomach acid;
- ▶ try raw potato juice if you have a juicer. Thoroughly wash the unpeeled potato before putting it in the juicer and mix with equal parts of water. Drink three times a day.
- ▶ in case of acid reflux between meals, eating half a ripe banana as a snack can bring some relief;
- ▶ drinking fennel or ginger tea stimulates digestion and helps neutralize acid. Aloe juice or gel is effective in alleviating the burning sensation of the digestive tract and stomach acidity. Avoid as much as possible baking soda and milk. Even though they are effective at temporarily reducing the burning sensation and digestive discomfort caused by gastric reflux, in the long run they will cause the stomach to produce even more acid and make the problem worse!

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# GASTROINTESTINAL DISCOMFORT



If you have scleroderma, you may have intestinal transit problems, causing symptoms such as constipation and/or diarrhea, bloating, pain, abdominal distention, etc.



In 2005, a new approach to nutrition was developed by Sue Shepherd, an Australian nutritionist. She discovered that the range of foods that cause gastrointestinal disorders extends much further than consumption of wheat and dairy products. What is this new approach? It is called the **FODMAP** diet, which consists in reducing consumption of certain foods that contain carbohydrates. These, when fermenting in the colon, produce bloating, gas, and abdominal pain. They are called "fermentable".

**F** = Fermentable (rapidly fermented by bacteria in the colon)

**O** = Oligosaccharides

**D** = Disaccharides

**M** = Monosaccharides

**A** = And

**P** = Polyols (sorbitol, mannitol, xylitol et maltitol)

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# GASTROINTESTINAL DISCOMFORT

### BUT WHAT DOES THE ACRONYM FODMAP MEAN?

Here are some examples of foods rich in FODMAP to watch for and, eventually, to limit or eliminate in order to improve intestinal comfort:

#### Fructose:

Apple, watermelon, mango, corn syrup

#### Lactose:

Milk, yogurt, cottage cheese, ricotta

#### Frutane:

Asparagus, cabbage, onion, wheat and rye (in large quantity), apple

#### Galacto-oligosaccharides:

Legumes (chickpeas, lentils, soybeans)

#### Polyols:

Apple, pear, watermelon, cauliflower, mushrooms, peppers, sugar "alcohol" (sorbitol, xylitol, maltitol), gum and unsweetened candy, etc.

Here are a few of my personal tricks to prevent or soothe discomfort following consumption of fermentable foods:

- ▶ add a piece of kombu seaweed when you cook legumes, to improve digestion. Some canned legumes already contain kombu;
- ▶ germinate legumes before cooking;
- ▶ add ginger to your meals;
- ▶ eat more gluten-free cereal (quinoa, buckwheat, etc.)
- ▶ replace milk with lactose-free milk or plant-based milks (almond, coconut, etc.)



- ▶ season with tamari sauce, miso, or baking powder. These condiments contain probiotics and/or enzymes that aid digestion (on top of adding flavor to dishes!);
- ▶ avoid eating dessert after a meal containing fermentable components;
- ▶ mint, fennel, ginger and cinnamon teas are excellent to promote digestion and eliminate gas after a heavy meal;
- ▶ puree vegetables to break the fibers that could cause irritation. Some people suffering from scleroderma sometimes have difficulty chewing raw vegetables, which can prevent adequate digestion. For example, cabbage-type vegetables, grated in a salad, will cause much less symptoms than if they are cut in large pieces;
- ▶ avoiding chewing gum (especially on an empty stomach, between meals), soft drinks or talking less while eating, can reduce bloating;
- ▶ eat slowly, chew your food well, and watch for repletion signals.

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# ARTERIAL HYPERTENSION AND SCLERODERMA



Arterial hypertension (AHT) is a frequent health problem for a lot of people. It happens when arterial blood pressure is abnormally high.

When arterial tension is caused by a disease, for example in case of renal involvement in a person suffering from scleroderma, or by frequent use of certain medications, it is called secondary arterial hypertension.

Even though we can't eliminate every risk factor, here are some recommendations that, mainly for primary AHT, but also for secondary AHT, can clearly contribute to a better control of arterial tension:

- ▶ reduce salted foods as much as you can (especially those that are highly processed such as chips, crackers, canned soups and sauces, etc.) as well as added salt. Sodium is one of the main causes of AHT;
- ▶ eat fresh fruits and vegetables that are rich in potassium, such as green vegetables (asparagus, spinach and peas), cruciferous vegetables (cabbage and broccoli), squash, sweet potato, apples, bananas, plums, grapes, cantaloupe, eggplant and melon;
- ▶ eat whole grain products;
- ▶ eat foods rich in omega-3, such as linseed, chia or hemp (vegetal sources) or oily fish such as salmon and trout (animal sources);
- ▶ avoid cold-cuts and cheese, as well as commercially processed dishes, often too high in sodium, or choose, in moderation, reduced-salt options;
- ▶ avoid caffeine, alcohol and tobacco;
- ▶ maintain a healthy weight;
- ▶ the following foods can, by promoting better blood circulation, help to lower arterial tension: Cayenne pepper, garlic, saffron, ginger, non-pasteurized apple-cider vinegar, olive oil and dark chocolate.



*The above recommendations are for information only and do not replace medication prescribed by your doctor. Scleroderma is a serious condition but I firmly believe in a global health approach that aims at adopting healthy life habits, starting with the food we eat.*

*References: Nutrition and Recipe Book for people with Scleroderma and articles from Sclérodemie Québec The Bulletin.*