



NUTRITION

WHY IS NUTRITION IMPORTANT?

Good nutrition means getting enough macronutrients and micronutrients. Macronutrients contain calories (energy): proteins, carbohydrates, and fats. They help you maintain your body weight. Micronutrients include vitamins and minerals. They keep your cells working properly, but will not prevent weight loss.

Good nutrition can be a problem for many people with HIV. When your body fights any infection, it uses more energy and you need to eat more than normal. But when you feel sick, you eat less than normal.

Some medications can upset your stomach, and some opportunistic infections can affect the mouth or throat. This makes it difficult to eat. Also, some medications and infections cause diarrhea. If you have diarrhea, your body actually uses less of what you eat.

When you lose weight, you might be losing fat, or you might be losing lean body weight like muscle. If you lose too much lean weight, your body chemistry changes. This condition is called wasting syndrome or cachexia. Wasting can kill you. If you lose more than 5% of your body weight, it could be a sign of wasting. Talk to your doctor.

NUTRITION GUIDELINES FOR PEOPLE WITH HIV

First, **eat more**. Extra muscle weight will help you fight HIV. This is very important. Many people want to lose weight, but for people with HIV, it can be dangerous.

Make sure you eat plenty of protein and starches, with moderate amounts of fat.

- **Protein** helps build and maintain your muscles. Meats, fish, beans, nuts, and seeds are good sources.
- **Carbohydrates** give you energy. **Complex** carbohydrates come from grains, cereals, vegetables, and fruits. They are a "time release" energy source and are a good source of fiber and nutrients. **Simple** carbohydrates, or sugars, give you

quick energy. You can get sugars in fresh or dried fruit, honey, jam, or syrups.

- **Fat** gives you extra energy. You need some — but not too much. The "monounsaturated" fats in nuts, seeds, canola and olive oils, and fish are considered "good" fats. The "saturated" fats in butter and animal products are "bad" fats.

A moderate **exercise** program will help your body turn your food into muscle. Take it easy, and work exercise into your daily activities.

Drinking enough **liquids** is very important when you have HIV. Extra water can reduce the side effects of medications. It can help you avoid a dry mouth and constipation. Remember that drinking tea, coffee, colas, chocolate, or alcohol can actually make you lose body liquid.

PRACTICE FOOD SAFETY

It's very important to protect yourself against infections that can be carried by food or water.

Be sure to wash your hands before preparing food, and keep all of your kitchen tools and work areas clean. Wash all fruits and vegetables carefully. Don't eat raw or undercooked eggs or meat, and clean up juices from raw meat quickly. Keep leftovers refrigerated and eat them within three days. Check the expiration date on foods. Don't buy them or eat them if they're outdated.

Some germs are spread through tap water. If your public water supply isn't totally pure, drink bottled water.

WHAT ABOUT SUPPLEMENTS?

Some people find it difficult to go shopping and prepare meals all the time. Supplements can help you maintain your body weight and get the vitamins and minerals you need. Don't use a product designed to help you lose weight, even if it says it contains everything needed for good nutrition! Your health care provider can help you choose a supplement that's right for you.

Vitamin and mineral supplements can be very helpful. They are discussed in Fact Sheet 801.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Good nutrition is very important for people with HIV. When you are HIV-positive, you will need to increase the amount of food you eat and maintain your lean body weight.

Be sure to eat a balanced diet, including plenty of protein and whole grain foods, with some sugar and fat. An exercise program will help build and maintain muscle.

Drink plenty of liquids to help your body deal with any medications you are taking.

Practice food safety. Keep your kitchen clean, wash foods, and be careful about food preparation and storage. If your tap water isn't pure, drink bottled water.

If you feel you need to use nutritional supplements, be sure to get some expert advice from your health care provider.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

You can get more information on nutrition and HIV from the following:

A Clinician's Guide To Nutrition In HIV and AIDS, by Cade Fields-Gardner and others, published by the American Dietetic Association, \$26 plus \$5 shipping and handling: The American Dietetic Association, P.O. Box 97215, Chicago IL 60678-7215; or 800-877-1600, ext. 5000.

Eat Up! Nutrition Advice and Food Ideas for People Living with HIV and AIDS by Charlie Smigelski, RD, \$10.00, <http://www.eatupbooks.com/hivbooks.html>

Nutrition and HIV: A New Model for Treatment by Mary Romeyn, MD, \$18.95, published by Jossey-Bass, Inc, telephone 415-433-1740.

Fact sheets on HIV nutrition are available at <http://www.larklands.net>

Reviewed May 22, 2008