

Food fundamentals

These basic tips are a great starting point for developing a good nutrition regimen

by Michele Blanchet

Springtime is a great time to start a healthy diet. Good nutrition plays a role in building and maintaining a strong immune system and preserving lean body mass (muscle). If you have HIV, you have increased requirements for calories, protein, vitamins, and minerals. It's important for you to focus on nutrition before malnutrition and weight loss become a problem.

But are you overwhelmed by all the different nutritional information you read? Follow these basic steps and you're well on your way to better nutrition.

Start with healthy, well-balanced eating

- ▶ Eat a variety of foods each day to help make sure you get all the nutrients you need.
- ▶ Enjoy a generous amount of fruits and vegetables, and whole grain breads and cereals.
- ▶ Obtain good sources of animal and plant protein such as red meat, poultry, fish, eggs, beans and lentils, and nuts and seeds.
- ▶ Consume enough low fat milk products to meet your daily calcium requirements of 1,200 - 1,500 mg.
- ▶ Limit empty calories such as sugar and sugar products—like candy, pop, and alcohol—which displace other nutritious foods.
- ▶ Use good sources of essential fats such as olive oil, canola oil, non-hydrogenated margarine, flax oil, and cold water fish.

Increase your intake of vitamins and minerals

Try to get as many vitamins and minerals as possible from the food you eat, but also consider taking the following supplements each day:

- ▶ A complete multivitamin and mineral complex with iron, one containing at least 25 - 50 mg of B vitamins, and 400 mcg folate
- ▶ Vitamin E: 400 - 800 IU
- ▶ Vitamin C: 500 - 1,000 mg
- ▶ Calcium: 1,200 - 1,500 mg, which must be taken with a multivitamin for the vitamin D.

Exercise

Exercise is important to maintain muscle mass and strength, maintain or increase bone mass, reduce abdominal fat, and improve triglycerides, blood sugars, mood, and quality of life. If you're trying to gain lean body mass, do weight-bearing exercises. It's motivating to have your muscle mass and fat stores measured, using a bioelectrical impedance analysis, every six months.

Drink enough fluid and safe water

- ▶ Drink 8 - 10 glasses daily of water, diluted fruit juice, tomato or vegetable juice (such as V8), milk, herbal teas, decaffeinated coffee or tea, or broth.

- ▶ If your CD4 count is less than 200, drink bottled, boiled, or filtered water.

Prepare and handle food safely

Food contains bacteria that can be harmful if you have a weakened immune system.

- ▶ Cook foods—especially meat, poultry, fish, and eggs—until well done.
- ▶ Store leftovers appropriately in fridge, reheat them—only once—until steaming, and consume them within three days.
- ▶ Don't leave food at room temperature for more than two hours.
- ▶ Wash your hands before processing food.
- ▶ Avoid contact between raw and cooked foods.
- ▶ Avoid sushi, steak tartar, Caesar salad dressing and eggnog made with raw eggs, unpasteurized juices, uncooked sprouts, liver paté, and uncooked shellfish.
- ▶ Wash fruits and vegetables well.
- ▶ *When in doubt, throw it out!*

If you have any nutritional problems

If you find it difficult to meet your nutritional needs or have any of the problems listed below, talk to a dietitian:

- ▶ you've lost your appetite
- ▶ you need to gain weight or stop weight loss
- ▶ you're experiencing diarrhea, nausea, or vomiting
- ▶ you have a sore mouth or problems swallowing
- ▶ you're too tired to shop or prepare food
- ▶ you're unable to obtain proper nutrition due to financial difficulties. ☺

Read up and eat up!

For more information about HIV/AIDS and nutrition, visit the AIDS Nutrition Service Alliance Web site at www.aidsnutrition.org and look under "Publications" for helpful nutrition fact sheets.

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