

Tips for Eating Well

Nutrition

Eating well is an important part of keeping well. A well-balanced diet can help if you are HIV positive and help your family at the same time.

Food:

- Enables the immune system to work at its best capacity
- Provides the body with all the essential nutrients required for good health
- Maintains weight
- Improves strength and energy
- Helps prevent illness
- Can be enjoyable.

What is a balanced diet?

Nutrients are the part of food that the body uses to produce energy for growth and movement, to build and repair tissue and to protect from infections. It is usually possible to obtain all the nutrients that the body needs in everyday, inexpensive food.

Every meal should ideally contain food from each of the following groups.

Energy giving foods These are foods like rice, maize or millet, porridge, bread, cassava, plantain or yam. They should be unprocessed to give the most benefit. These foods provide the main part of the meal and most of the energy.

- Animal fats, vegetable oils and nuts are a concentrated form of energy but should be used sparingly if there is any danger of diarrhoea

Body building foods These are foods like chicken, fish, eggs, dairy produce, beans, lentils, peas or nuts. These contain protein and minerals such as iron, zinc, calcium and some vitamins.

- Try to avoid red meat and pork which have more toxins and take longer to digest

Clean water Water is a source of life. It is important that it is clean or sterilised before drinking.

Vitamin-rich foods These are foods like vegetables, especially dark green and orange vegetables, and fruits.

What if I don't feel like eating?

It is extremely important to eat a diet which will help to:

- Increase the appetite and enable you to take in enough nutrients
- Recover weight and strength lost during illness

Helpful hints:

- Try and eat small amounts more often than usual. If possible introduce variety into your meals
- If you are feeling nauseous avoid strong smelling foods and cooking smells that linger

My mouth sores really hurt

If you are experiencing painful mouth sores, try to eat food which does not need to be chewed, for example yoghurt, porridge, soup, or mashed fruit or vegetables. Paw paw and yoghurt contain enzymes which will soothe and help to heal sores.

- It is important not to boil vegetables for a long time in a lot of water. Much of the vitamin content is thrown out with the cooking water. If possible steam vegetables.
- Cool food may be more soothing than hot food. Avoid using spicy and peppery foods. Avoid fruit juices - milk based drinks are often more soothing to the mouth and throat.
- Tea tree oil gargles can be very helpful at relieving candida (thrush) in the mouth and throat.

See Fact Sheet 7: Thrush

How can I possibly eat with diarrhoea?

Diarrhoea may damage the gut so that fewer nutrients are absorbed. Damaged intestines need easily digestible foods such as porridge or soups. In some cases fatty or oily foods can make diarrhoea worse because the gut cannot absorb them.

Milk may also cause poor absorption in some people. Damaged intestines may sometimes be intolerant to lactose which is the natural sugar found in milk. If your diarrhoea persists you may want to consider cutting out milk from your diet to see whether the diarrhoea lessens.

However, some women who cannot tolerate milk may be able to eat yoghurt which helps to restore the natural intestinal balance. Remember that sometimes antibiotics make diarrhoea worse. Try to eat live yogurt when you are taking antibiotics.

During illness, especially diarrhoea and vomiting, it is essential to drink extra fluids to prevent dehydration. Try things like thin porridge, coconut water, fruit juices mixed with clean water, thin vegetable soups or yoghurt-based drinks. Mineral salts, which can be bought in chemists and may be called heat tablets or rehydration salts, can also help to prevent dehydration.

- If a child has diarrhoea and is dehydrated, he or she needs oral rehydration solutions and further care as quickly as possible. If there is no dehydration, give the child a diet which contains less animal milk until the diarrhoea stops:
- If the child is only breastfeeding, give more frequent, longer breastfeeds, night and day
- If the child is taking other milk, replace the amount of other milk given by half and replace with nutrient-rich semi-solid foods

Preparing food safely

Living with HIV can make us vulnerable to infection. Clean food preparation and storage can reduce the spread of germs, including those that cause diarrhoea.

- Cook food until it is thoroughly heated and heat liquids until they start to bubble, to kill any germs
- Avoid storing cooked food for more than 24 hours. Thoroughly reheat food that has been kept more than two hours after being cooked. Store water and food in clean, covered containers
- Wash fruit and vegetables with clean water
- Use clean water for drinking and preparing food. Boil water for ten minutes or filter
- Wash hands with water and soap or ashes before and after food preparation or eating food
- Make sure everyone in your family washes their hands with water and soap or ashes after defecating and before eating food
- Use clean utensils for preparing food and eating
- Keep the area where you do your cooking as clean as possible
- Ensure that your food is protected from insects, rodents and pets.