

DIET AND HEP C



People living with a chronic illness often need to make changes to their everyday lives. The examples in this brochure are meant as a guide only. We hope that you find some of these useful.

WHY IS DIET SO IMPORTANT?

Diet is very important for liver health, as it is this organ which processes the foods that we eat and makes the products needed by other parts of our bodies. Eating a healthy diet and undertaking adequate physical activity are the keys to good health. Nutrients in the food we eat are needed to build new body tissue, repair damaged body tissue and drive the many complicated chemical reactions that let our bodies work well.

There is no specific diet to follow if living with hepatitis C. Instead, people should aim for a well balanced and varied diet that is low in fat, as is recommended for the general population.

HEALTHY EATING GUIDELINES

We need a combination of protein, carbohydrates, polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats, vitamins, minerals and fibre in our diet to supply us with energy and keep us healthy. When we get the right type and amounts of nutrients our bodies are better equipped to deal with illness and stress. Hepatitis C can cause a loss of appetite. Some people feel nauseous, bloated and uncomfortable after eating fatty foods and after drinking alcohol. This is because our body's ability to make bile, the substance which breaks down fat during digestion, has been affected.

We can take control of improving our health through good nutrition. Follow these six principles when shopping, cooking and eating:

1. Eat in the right balance across the food groups:



2. Eat as close to the original source as possible. Buy whole food as close to the way nature made it - fresh fruit, vegetables and whole grains.
3. Eat a wide variety of foods. Be adventurous and expand the range of fruits and vegetables you eat. Choose foods that are in season as much as possible.
4. Prepare your food in a more healthy way.
5. Try to eat as much raw food as possible - salads, raw or blanched vegetables, fresh fruit. Instead of boiling try shallow Substitute healthy options for less healthy foods. For example, try plain crackers instead of sweet biscuits.
6. Drink at least 6 - 8 glasses of water daily.

THINGS WE CAN DO TO KEEP OUR LIVER HEALTHY

We can get into some good habits to keep our liver healthy and help it do its many jobs:

- Get plenty of regular sleep (6-10 hours a night). Don't become over-tired.
- Eat small, regular meals and healthy snacks as this puts less strain on the liver and digestive system. Don't skip meals.
- Don't fast, the liver needs adequate amounts of nutrients to carry out its normal work.
- Drink plenty of water as our body needs it to get rid of toxins. Keep a bottle of water on your desk at work or school, nearby at home and in the car.
- Avoid saturated fats (like fatty meats, full-cream dairy products & tropical oils).
- Avoid fatty takeaway foods, alcohol and caffeine.
- Exercise regularly.

WHILST ON TREATMENT

The criteria for access to combination treatment states that people must drink no more than seven standard alcoholic drinks per week, however it is important to remember that there is no safe drinking level for people with hepatitis C. The less someone drinks, the more favourable the long-term outcome. In particular, while undergoing treatment it is best to consume as little alcohol as possible, especially as alcohol reduces the effectiveness of the treatment.

People undergoing antiviral treatment may suffer from nausea and this can make mealtimes difficult. If this is the case, try eating small healthy snacks frequently during the course of the day, rather than eating the three traditional larger meals. Planning meals for times when nausea is least likely to occur may be helpful. Choose foods that do not have a strong smell. Natural remedies such as peppermint, fresh ginger root, spearmint, chamomile, fennel seed and aniseed teas may help alleviate nausea. GPs may also be able to prescribe anti-nausea medication if it is required.

Some people on treatment lose their appetite, making it difficult to maintain an adequate supply of nutrients. Varying the colour and texture of dishes to make meals as tempting as possible may help. Exercise may help to stimulate the appetite; however it is important to make sure to exercise within energy limits at the time. It is not usually necessary for people living with hepatitis C to require specialised dietary advice, as very few will progress to a stage of advanced liver disease. However, if someone loses a significant amount of weight, has another medical condition or any other concerns, they should speak to their doctor or seek referral to a dietician.

Adapted from the HepatitisWA's Website, topic originally written by Deborah Bowman, Naturopath.
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