

ALL ABOUT NUTRITION AND HIV

WHY IS NUTRITION IMPORTANT?

While nutrition is vital to everyone's survival, it is particularly crucial to those living with HIV infection. There are several ways that a good diet can help HIV-positive people remain healthy:

- **Fighting HIV.** Cells and chemicals used by the immune system require nutrients to fight HIV.
- **Protecting the body.** Diet may help alleviate HIV symptoms and medication side effects such as diarrhea, nausea, fatigue and lipodystrophy, as well as metabolic problems like elevated cholesterol, triglycerides and blood sugar.
- **Wasting.** Excessive weight loss, decreased muscle mass and malnutrition continue to be common problems in HIV, despite HIV treatment advances.

WHAT, EXACTLY, IS A GOOD DIET?

A good diet contains adequate amounts of all three nutrient groups: protein, carbohydrates and fat.

- **Protein.** Proteins are the building blocks of muscle, organs and many substances in the immune system. If there's not enough protein in your diet, your body takes protein from your muscles to meet its fuel needs.
- **Carbohydrates.** Carbs are your main source of energy. Complex carbohydrates, such as those found in whole grains, legumes (beans) and vegetables are best. Your daily intake of simple carbohydrates—such as sugary foods, white flour and soft drinks—should be limited.
- **Fats.** Your body converts fats to energy when the sugar from carbohydrates runs low. Saturated fats, such as those found in fatty meats and dairy foods, can raise your cholesterol levels and increase your risk for heart problems. Monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats, such as those in nuts, fish and various oils, are best.

WHAT ABOUT CALORIES?

Calories are the energy in food. Your caloric intake will depend on your activity level and health. You need at least 17 to 20 calories per pound of body weight per day. If you exercise regularly, work an energy-demanding job, are losing weight or have an active opportunistic infection, you may need more.

Consult with a nutritionist or a registered dietitian to learn more information about how many calories a day you should be consuming and how to choose nutrient-rich foods.

WHAT ABOUT SUPPLEMENTS?

It can be difficult to get 100% of the recommended daily allowance (RDA) of nutrients through food alone. For this reason, experts advise taking one or two multivitamin/mineral tablets a day. Additional supplements containing higher levels of antioxidants, essential fatty acids and vitamin B12 may also be necessary, but talk with your doctor or nutritionist about whether or not these are right for you.

If you are having difficulty gaining or losing weight or are experiencing changes to your body shape (lipodystrophy), talk with your health care provider about supplements and other therapies that might be helpful to you.

QUICK TIPS

You are what you eat. Choose well, say HIV nutrition experts.

■ ALL TOGETHER

Your daily diet should be 15% to 20% protein, 50% to 60% carbs and 25% fat.

■ SHOP THE RAINBOW

Eat five to six servings (three cups) of fruits and vegetables per day. Eat food of a variety of colors to get a full range of nutrients.

■ GOOD GRAINS

Aim to have 50% of your carbs come from whole-grain breads, cereals, rice and pasta.

■ LEAN PROTEIN

Choose skinless chicken breast, fish and extra-lean pork and beef. A general rule is 100 to 150 grams/day for men and 80 to 100 grams/day for women.

■ TRIM THE FAT

Saturated fats should make up 7% or less of your total calorie intake. Ten percent or more can come from monounsaturated fats from sources such as nuts, seeds, olive oil, avocado and fish.

■ NOT SO SWEET

Limit intake of sweets and other "junk" foods. They contain few nutrients and can raise unhealthy blood sugars and triglycerides.

■ SNACK WELL

Include all major nutrient groups: protein, carbs and a little fat.

For more nutrition tips, search www.poz.com