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Guide to Healthful Living for People with H.I.V.

Basic Nutrition Manual for People Living with H.I.V.

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Human

Immunodeficiency Virus affects your nutritional status. Studies have shown that people with H.I.V. tend to eat less

than people who are H.I.V. negative. The process appears to begin early in the infection. Often it is subtle and may go unnoticed. Therefore, it is important to monitor your food intake and be aware of how much you eat. Intake is the first step in obtaining the nutrients you need. If you are not eating enough it will be harder for your body to get the nutrients it needs, as well as calories (units of energy).

H.I.V. changes the structure and function of cells that line the gut. These changes result in changes in nutrient absorption (the process of extracting nutrients from food and transferring them into the blood which occurs primarily

in the small intestines). We call this improper digestive process - malabsorption. Malabsorption is a primary cause of nutrient deficiencies. Extra nutrients in the form of supplements may help to compensate for this process.

Another aspect of H.I.V.'s interference in your nutritional status involves the metabolism of nutrients. This is a complex body process. The changes in this process result in the nutrients being inappropriately converted into fat in the liver. Fats are stored instead of being converted into energy, energy needs are met by sugars and when sugars are gone the body converts proteins into energy. This protein is taken from your lean body mass (muscle). The liver continues to make fats in preference to proteins so that lost protein is not replaced. This process is greatly increased in the presence of an active secondary infection.

There are also changes in the metabolic rate. These changes reflect the way energy is used by the body. People with H.I.V. will expend more energy while resting, the body will compensate for this by reducing the energy spent during activity. This change is partly responsible for fatigue and lethargy. This process is also greater in persons with active secondary infection.

All of these changes can result in changes in your overall nutritional status. Many studies have shown that people with H.I.V. have a tendency toward certain vitamin and mineral deficiencies. Among the most common are Vitamin B1 (thiamine), Vitamin B2 (riboflavin), Vitamin B6 (pyridoxine), Vitamin B12 (cobalamin), folate magnesium, selenium and zinc.

Nutrient deficiencies may cause or exacerbate symptoms such as neuropathy, myelopathy, fatigue, depression, skin rashes, diarrhoea and so on. The immune system itself relies on certain nutrients in order to function properly.

For people living with an immune system that is already impaired, poor nutritional status will put more stress onto an already stressed system. Nutritional supplements can be of great benefit. As a general rule people with H.I.V. need to eat a high calorie / high protein diet.

The importance of protein cannot be overstated. Proteins are the building blocks of the human body. The immune system requires protein to function properly. Our lean body mass or muscle is protein. In H.I.V. infection when we lose protein we are losing muscle. A high protein diet coupled with a light anabolic (muscle building) exercise program can help to prevent the loss of muscle, and build up protein store.

Changes in your metabolism may increase your caloric need. Decreased intake (not eating enough) malabsorption and diarrhoea can reduce calories and nutrients available for your body's use. Not enough calories means not enough energy for your body to function. Not enough protein in your diet exacerbates the loss of lean body mass (muscle). Not enough nutrients can lead to nutritional deficiencies that may result in symptoms like skin rashes, or neuropathy, or fatigue (to name a few). How much protein do you need a day? That can be determined by doing calculations for caloric/protein needs, or by consulting your doctor or nutritionist.

In order to keep track of your daily protein intake: every egg and every ounce of meat, fish or poultry is 7 grams. Every half cup serving of cheese or glass of milk is 7 grams. Every serving of vegetables (half cup cooked, full cup raw) is two grams. Every half cup of complex carbohydrates or slice of bread is three grams. Every cup of casserole or combination food is 13 to 20 grams. These

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measurements allow you to keep track of your protein intake easily.

Food borne germs are a problem that needs to be addressed. How you pick, store and prepare your food is very important. When choosing fresh fruit or vegetables avoid any that are bruised. wash fruit and vegetables thoroughly, preferably soak them in a sink full of water with a teaspoon of iodine. This will minimise surface bacteria.

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