

A Guide to Eating Well with a Respiratory Disorder

Aims of this booklet

People who have a respiratory disorder can be at risk of developing problems with eating. This can lead to unexpected and unplanned weight loss.

This information booklet is designed to help:

- Ensure you can meet your energy and protein needs.
- Prevent poor nutrition that can occur with respiratory problems.
- Enjoy a wide variety of foods.

Does it matter what I eat?

What you eat is important in the treatment of respiratory disease. Without enough nutrients, particularly protein, energy, vitamins and minerals, the body will start to break down muscle tissue in order to provide an alternative energy source. This can lead to reduced strength of the breathing muscles that may already be weakened.

Shortness of breath can also cause difficulties when eating. Foods that require lots of chewing or foods that stay in the mouth for a long time can make breathing more difficult.

The tendency can then be to associate food with becoming short of breath and as a result, food intakes can become reduced. Good nutrition can help to reduce the risk of chest infections and promote effective management of the respiratory condition.

Helpful hints

- Eat little and often throughout the day (3 smaller meals and 2-3 snacks throughout the day).

- Have high calorie snacks to pick at throughout the day.
- Choose soft moist foods that slip down the throat easily and reduce the risk of choking or irritation to the throat which can trigger coughing.
- Avoid using a straw as this can force fluid into the back of the mouth too quickly and cause you to cough.
- Fortify foods where possible (see food fortification tips on page 5).
- Eat food slowly and breathe evenly.
- Make the most of times when you are not so short of breath to eat more.
- Try to sit upright when eating and avoid slouching or sitting in reclining or soft chairs
- Avoid very hot/cold foods (these could trigger forced breathing and aggravate coughing).
- Drink fluids before or after meals rather than during meals.
- Ensure adequate fluid intakes – 8-10 cups or glasses (approximately 2 litres) choosing milky drinks and avoiding low calorie or diet drinks.
- Plan your meals ahead to ensure that you have enough food to last when you are feeling tired or ill.

Planning your meals

It is very important to have a varied diet. Try to include foods from each of the following groups:

Starchy foods

These foods are the body's main source of energy and should be included at each meal time.

- **Cereals** e.g. porridge, Weetabix, Shredded Wheat.

- **Bread** e.g. wholemeal, granary and white breads, rolls, pittas, chapattis.
- **Rice/pasta/noodles** – all types.
- **Potatoes** e.g. mashed, jacket, boiled, roast or chips.

Most of these foods can be fortified to increase their nutritional content of energy and protein.

Increasing your fibre intake by choosing wholegrain breads and cereals can help to reduce constipation. You also need to ensure that you drink enough fluids when having a high fibre diet.

Protein containing foods

A food rich in protein should be included at each meal. Protein is needed for the growth and repair of the body's tissues and cells and in respiratory disease can be used as an energy source if intakes are poor

Examples of foods containing protein are red meat, poultry, fish, nuts, lentils, beans and milk. Well cooked eggs are also a good source of protein but care should be taken to ensure that they are well cooked until the yolk is hard. Avoid soft boiled eggs for food safety reasons.

Oily fish contains Omega-3 which may help to reduce inflammation. Examples of oily fish include salmon, pilchards, kippers, sardines and fresh tuna (tinned tuna or tuna in oil is not included). Be careful to avoid fish which has too many bones which may not be suitable for some people who have problems with choking.

Dairy foods

Milk, yoghurts and cheese are rich sources of calcium which is important in preventing osteoporosis (thinning of the bones). Those people taking steroids to reduce inflammation of their airways are at a greater risk of developing osteoporosis and therefore should ensure good intakes of calcium in their diet.

Fats, oils and sugary foods

These foods are energy dense and can help to maintain or increase weight.

Butter, margarine, cream, oil, sugar, honey, jam, syrup can all be used to fortify everyday foods to increase the amount of calories they contain.

Fruit and vegetables

Fruit and vegetables are a good source of vitamins and minerals. They are also a good source of fibre to help prevent constipation.

They should be used as part of a healthy balanced diet and you should aim for 5 portions of fruit and vegetables per day.

Although alone they do not contain much energy, when combined as a fruit salad or fruit smoothies, they can be used as a high energy snack or drink. Chopped, dried fruits, tinned fruits in syrups are useful snacks which can be included on a daily basis.

Fluid

Try to have 8-10 cups of fluid per day (roughly 2 litres) to help prevent dehydration and constipation. Suitable drinks include water, fruit squash, fresh fruit juice, full fat milk, decaffeinated teas and herbal teas.

Limit your intake of drinks such as coffee and tea which could make you dehydrated if over consumed.

Adequate hydration can help clear mucus. There is no evidence to suggest that high intakes of milky drinks increase mucus production or thickness – this is likely due to not drinking enough fluids.

Fortifying foods

The following suggestions will help to add extra calories and protein to everyday foods.

Milk

- Use full cream milk – aim for 1 pint/day.
- Try fortified milk – add 2-4 tbsps of milk powder to 1 pint of full cream milk. You can use this milk in cereals, puddings, soups, sauces, hot drinks etc.
- Use condensed or evaporated milk if you prefer.
- Add cold milk to blackcurrant juice, milkshake powder, mashed banana or yoghurt.
- Long life, powdered, evaporated and tinned milks, custards and yoghurts are all useful stock items to have in the kitchen.

Breakfast cereals

- Use fortified / full cream milk or cream.
- Add extra jam, honey or syrup.
- Add dried fruits and/or nuts.
- Bread rolls or pastries can be frozen.

Mashed potato

- Use fortified milk / cream.
- Add butter or margarine and cheese.

Sandwiches

- Spread thickly with butter or margarine.
- Add mayonnaise or salad cream to fillings such as tuna, egg, cheese or meat.

Soups

- Add cream/ fortified milk.
- Choose 'cream of' or condensed soups and make up with milk.
- Add grated cheese or croutons.
- Add dumplings, beans, pasta or potato.
- Use condensed soups as the base sauce for casseroles and stews.

Fruit and vegetables

- Melt butter or margarine on top.
- Sprinkle with melted cheese.
- Add olive oil dressings / salad cream / mayonnaise to salads.
- Serve with a cheese or cream sauce.
- Roast vegetables in the oven with oil.
- Tinned or dried fruits can be combined with custards, cream etc.
- Tinned and frozen fruit and vegetables can all be fortified and used as a part of meal or snack.

High energy snack ideas

Savoury

- crisps
- nuts (Bombay mix)
- quiche
- pork pies
- toasted crumpets
- English muffins
- sausage rolls

Sweet

- cereal bars
- chocolate
- biscuits
- muffins
- ice-cream
- pastries
- cake

Savoury

- cheese and biscuits
- sandwiches
- scotch eggs

Sweet

- milk puddings
- rice pudding
- custard
- full fat yoghurts
- teacakes
- Devon cream tea

High energy / protein drinks

Milky drinks

- Full cream milk
- Milkshakes
- Smoothies – made with fruit, milk yoghurt etc
- Hot chocolate
- Malted drinks
- Yoghurt drinks

Sugary drinks (avoiding diet, no added sugar varieties)

- Fizzy drinks i.e. cola, Lucozade
- Squash
- Fresh fruit juice

Those people with diabetes who need nutritional support to gain weight should ask their GP to refer them to a Dietitian for more individualised advice.

Nutritional supplements

Notes

Some people may find that they need additional help with maintaining or gaining weight.

Oral nutritional supplements are available in several forms, some of which can be prescribed by your GP. Meritene and Complan are enriched drinks sold in the pharmacy and supermarkets. They are ideally suited to be taken between meals rather than replacing the meal. Some of them can be combined with everyday foods to increase energy and protein content of the food.

Other nutritional supplements can be suggested following assessment by a dietitian who will be able to estimate your nutritional requirements for energy and protein and advise you on appropriate forms of food fortification and meal plans prior to suggesting supplements. Advice should be sought prior to commencing supplements.

Nutritional supplement drinks are ideally suited to between meals, replacing low energy drinks such as water or squash. However some people may feel full following a supplement and may find it beneficial to take the supplements in the afternoon or evening after meals.

The quantity of supplements that you need can be discussed with a dietitian who can also decide which supplement would best meet your needs.

Other useful information

- If you find it difficult to prepare foods, convenience foods such as ready meals which are frozen or chilled and only require reheating can help to save time, energy and food wastage.
- At home, you may be entitled to have meals-on-wheels or frozen meals delivered. To find out more, contact the Home Care Organiser in your local Social Services Department.

Written information cannot replace personalised recommendations. For further advice please seek a dietetic referral from your consultant or GP.

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