

Nutrition and Myeloma

Dietary intake is an important way to control well-being with myeloma. Eating a well-balanced diet will help maintain muscle mass and strength, increase energy levels and promote recovery after periods of treatment. It is possible that appetite and dietary requirements will vary and there may be times, especially when receiving treatment for myeloma, that eating and drinking may be more difficult.

This information sheet describes what a well-balanced diet should consist of as well as tips for healthy eating when appetite may be reduced.

What is a well-balanced diet?

A well-balanced diet is one that will supply your body with all its nutritional needs so that it functions well. Your diet should consist of foods from each of the major food groups and should be rich in all the essential vitamins and minerals.

A well balanced diet should include:

Protein – to help build new cells and replace old ones. Foods that contain protein include meat, dairy products, nuts and fish.

Carbohydrates – provide an ideal source of energy. There are two types of carbohydrate; complex and simple. Complex carbohydrates are often referred to as starch and simple ones as sugars. Foods that contain carbohydrates include bread, pasta and rice.

Fats – are a valuable source of energy. Fats are also needed to transport some vitamins around the body. A healthy diet includes more fat from fish, nuts, seeds and olive oil (monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats) than from meat, dairy, cakes, biscuits and chocolate (saturated fats).

Fibre – helps the digestive system work efficiently. Foods that are high in fibre include bran, whole wheat bread and cereals, as well as most fruit and vegetables. It is recommended to eat five portions of vegetables and two portions of fruit each day.

Vitamins and minerals – are essential nutrients, they work together in many of the body's systems. They help strengthen bones, maintain healthy nerves, heal wounds, and support the immune system. They also convert food into energy, and repair cellular damage. Vitamins and minerals can be destroyed in the cooking process, so avoid overcooking food.

Drinking enough fluid – drinking at least 2 liters of fluid each day (unless you are on a fluid restriction) is recommended to keep your kidneys working well and eliminate waste products from your body.

Most drinks are good with some exceptions:

- o Coffee and alcohol should be drunk in moderation, in excess they can contribute to dehydration
- o Sugary soft drinks and juices, especially when you are on steroid therapy which can increase blood sugar levels
- o Green tea interferes with the action of Velcade® (bortezomib) so should be avoided during the course of treatment

What makes a well-balanced diet difficult to maintain when you have myeloma?

Myeloma and its treatment may have side-effects that make maintaining a balanced diet difficult. These include:

- Loss of appetite – many medications reduce your appetite as well as your enjoyment of food
- Taste and smell changes – decreased or a metallic taste after chemotherapy treatment
- Sore, dry mouth – especially after high-dose chemotherapy
- Nausea and vomiting
- Tiredness or fatigue
- Heartburn (indigestion)
- Diarrhoea or constipation – an alteration in your normal bowel habit can temporarily put you off food
- Anxiety and depression
- Steroids - these can increase your appetite and lead to weight gain

Tips to maintain a healthy diet when appetite is low

- Eat small amounts regularly throughout the day
- If experiencing a sore mouth or taste changes ask the treating team about topical treatments that can be used and keep the mouth fresh and clean by using a non-alcohol based mouthwash
- Light gentle exercise (e.g. walking) may stimulate the appetite and improve fatigue
- Ask to see a dietitian to advise about diets and supplements as needed to ensure an intake of all the essential vitamins and minerals.
- When not fatigued try cooking larger portions and freeze some for another day, ask for help with cooking and shopping and be as active as possible to reduce the effects of fatigue.
- Exercise and activity is great for bone strength, muscle bulk, bowel health and appetite as well as giving a sense of well-being.
- When food intake is low, it is important to drink enough fluid. A good way to achieve this is to have a drink bottle nearby and take sips often. A squeeze of lemon juice in the water can help make it more palatable.

Is a special diet ever necessary?

There are no specific long term diet recommendations for people living with myeloma apart from a well-balanced diet. Situations which may require adjustments to this diet include:

If neutropenic (very low white cell count) or the immune system is not working well. It may be necessary to avoid certain foods to reduce the chances of picking up a foodborne infection. These foods include:

- Raw or undercooked eggs, meat, fish or shellfish
- Unpasteurised dairy products
- Soft or blue cheeses
- Pate
- Takeaway foods or foods that have not been freshly prepared (e.g. from a buffet)

Safe food handling practices are recommended such as washing hands and cooking utensils thoroughly with soap before eating and adhering to 'best before' and 'use by' dates. Food should be stored in the refrigerator or freezer and if eating leftovers ensure they are reheated to hot.

When taking steroids it may be necessary to seek specialist advice from a dietitian or diabetes educator if the blood sugar levels become very high. Especially if diabetes is already an identified issue.

Should I see a Dietitian?

A dietitian is a health professional who uses evidence based recommendations to help people modify their diets to help treat symptoms, maintain a healthy weight and get the most out of their food.

Dietitian services can be accessed through the hospital, community health centre or in private practice. If you would like to locate an accredited dietitian who specialises in cancer or has experience with myeloma patients please contact the Dietitians Association of Australia (contact details below).

If accessed in the community, many private health funds will provide a rebate for this service. It is also possible to access 5 free visits to a dietitian by utilising the Medicare funded Chronic Disease Management Plan (CDMP) via the GP.

Useful resources

Cancer Council
www.cancercouncil.com.au

Food and Cancer Guide

Leukaemia Foundation
www.leukaemia.com

Eating Well Guide

The Dietitians Association of Australia
www.daa.asn.au

1800 812 942

Australian Government Department of Health, Chronic Disease Management Plan
<http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/mbsprimarycare-chronicdiseasemanagement>

The information in this fact sheet is not intended to replace medical care or the advice of a physician.

A doctor should always be consulted regarding diagnosis and treatment.

For further information please contact one of our Myeloma Support Nurses on our Support Line:

1800 MYELOMA (1800 693 566)

or visit our website: **www.myeloma.org.au**