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EATING AND DRINKING



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This leaflet answers those questions most frequently asked by patients and their families during the first few months after surgery.

Q What should I eat?

A It is important to eat a balanced diet to give you all the nutrients that your body needs. Try to eat the following every day:

- ▶ Starchy foods, such as, cereals, pasta and rice.
- ▶ Protein sources, such as, tender meat, fish, eggs, milk and cheese.
- ▶ Dairy products, such as, milk, cheese, yoghurts and cream.
- ▶ Fruit and vegetables.
- ▶ Food containing fats and sugar.

If you include sugar, remember to clean your teeth regularly to prevent tooth decay. This is particularly important if you have had or are going to have radiotherapy treatment.

Q Will I need to eat different sorts of food?

A Keep to soft foods for about two weeks after you start to eat, then gradually introduce other foods such as tender meat in casseroles, fish in sauce, cauliflower cheese and cooked vegetables. The dietitian will give you further advice and ideas about foods to try.

Q Why might I lose weight?

A You lose weight when you eat fewer calories than your body needs. You now have less space in your stomach, so are not able to store the same amount of food. This means you cannot eat as much as you used to and you will feel full very quickly after a meal.

You may also have difficulty swallowing initially and occasionally some people have long term difficulties.

Q How can I prevent weight loss?

A You need to increase the amount of calories you are eating or drinking by:

- ▶ Eating small, frequent meals and snacks.
- ▶ Enrich your food/drinks by adding milk powder, grated cheese, mayonnaise, cream, butter, olive oil, powdered nuts, full fat milk and yoghurt.
- ▶ Choose nourishing drinks such as full fat milk, milkshakes, hot milky or yoghurt drinks in preference to water, squash, tea or coffee.
- ▶ Choose soft foods that are easy to swallow, chew your food well and lubricate all food with gravy, sauce or custard.

Q Should I eat and drink together?

A It is a good idea to drink between meals so that you do not feel too full to eat.

“She learnt to do things in an order, it did restrict her, but she worked round it, so that she got the most out of it.”
(SLH)

Q How often should I eat?

A The amount of food your stomach can hold is less than normal, so it is important to eat regular snacks in addition to your smaller meals. This will help to stop you feeling dizzy or irritable from hunger.

“Although I had to eat small regular meals in the first few months, as time went by I was able to eat bigger meals at greater intervals. You need to be patient.” (CP)

“Now I have to stop (eating) because it is so uncomfortable once it is up to a certain level.” (BEY)

Q Why do I get acid/food reflux and how can I stop it?

A There is no muscle at the top of your stomach, so food and acid can travel up into your mouth. To prevent this:

- ▶ Sit upright during and after eating.
 - ▶ Do not bend over or lie down after eating.
 - ▶ Eat your last meal or snack a few hours before bed.
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- ▶ Try sleeping with extra pillows to raise your head or raise the head of your bed on bricks/wood.
- ▶ Plan activities between mealtimes, so that food has gone down first. This is particularly important if you need to bend down or raise your arms.
- ▶ Take an inflatable pillow on long journeys.
- ▶ Talk to the medical team as medication may have a role in improving your symptoms.

“I usually eat my last meal at 5pm, rarely later. Otherwise I would have to sit up in bed ... it gets acidy.” (LL)

Q Why do I sometimes feel weak, sweaty or light-headed after eating?

A If you experience these symptoms soon after eating, it may be caused by the quicker movement of food into your small intestine. These symptoms can be avoided by restricting sweet or sugary foods. This problem is not very common so you should not avoid sweet things unless you notice these symptoms. If you feel weak, faint, cold or sweaty about two hours after a meal eat a small carbohydrate snack, such as a banana.

Q Why is it difficult to talk during or after eating?

A When you start to speak, the pressure in the chest is raised to allow air to be pushed out. Try to:

- ▶ Make telephone calls before eating.
- ▶ Get an answerphone and return calls when it suits you.
- ▶ Plan your meals and drink around what you have to do and what you want to achieve.

“If I want to speak, I organise my meals around that. I try to live as near normal a life as I can. So it means organising as much as I can.” (BEY)

Q What should I do if I am having difficulty swallowing, food does not stay down, I am losing weight or have bowel problems?

A Contact the healthcare team that are looking after you as soon as possible so that they can find out why this is happening and help to address the problem.

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