

# Eating Well Before, During and After Your Stem Cell Transplant

## My Details:

Name:

My hospital number:

My NHS number:

My Consultant:

My Clinical Specialist Nurse:

My Dietitian:

## Why have I been given this booklet?

Some people may experience difficulty maintaining their weight and/or eating enough during a stem cell transplant. This can be due to the side effects of treatment, problems relating to existing medical conditions and difficulty eating a normal diet.

Being well nourished is an important part of your treatment and can help with recovery.

This booklet is designed to provide you with additional information to support your nutrition before, during and after your stem cell transplant.

As part of your treatment plan, you will be referred to a dietitian. Their role will be to support you with your nutrition according to your needs.

Please bring this booklet with you to any outpatient appointment as it contains your weight record.

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# Part 1 – Getting Ready

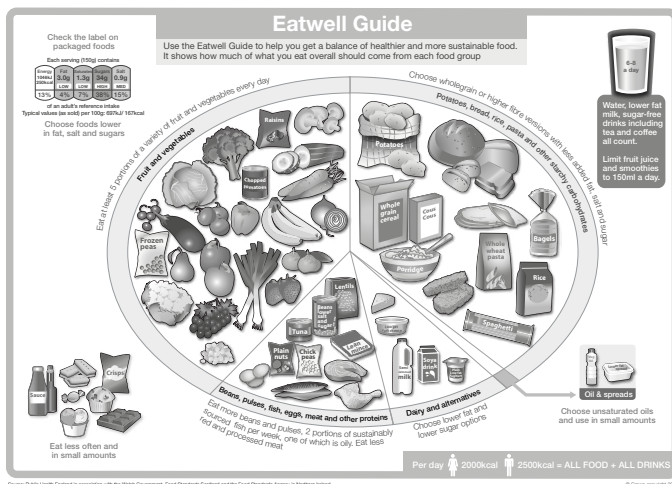
## What can I eat to prepare for treatment?

Eating a healthy/well balanced diet is important for you to get the right amount of nutrients that your body needs. Getting this right before you have your stem cell transplant is an important part of your treatment.

For most people, a healthy diet includes:

- Plenty of fruit, vegetables, wholegrains and cereals
- Modest amounts of meat, beans, lentils & pulses and milk products
- Small amounts of fats, sugars and salts
- Plenty of fluids

The picture below displays the Eatwell Guide which represents a healthy, well balanced diet.



Eating a healthy/well balanced diet and in some cases even gaining some weight prior to stem cell transplant can help you stay strong and help recovery. It may help you cope better with the side effects of the treatment (see 'During Treatment' section).

Before, during and after your stem cell transplant, your dietitian may recommend foods that you may normally consider "unhealthy".

These foods are higher in calories (energy) and will help build up reserves to minimise weight loss during and after treatment.

Ways to make the most of your food before starting treatment include:

- Introducing 2-3 high calorie (energy) snacks a day in addition to your normal meals
- Choose foods high in calories and protein (\*see explanation below)
- Fortify your meals by adding foods such as butter, cream, cheese, mayonnaise, jam/ honey
- Include a dessert at the end of each meal
- Use full fat milk to make nourishing drinks such as malted drinks, milky coffee, milkshakes and hot chocolate
- You could even try fortified milk: mixing 4 tablespoons of dried skimmed milk powder to 600mls (1 pint) of full-fat milk to add to drinks, cereals, soups, sauces or puddings

\* High calorie (energy) and high protein foods:

- Sugary foods and fats are both a good source of calories (energy)
- Foods high in protein are meat, poultry, fish, dairy and/or plant-based milk (aim for full fat), dairy foods, eggs, pulses (beans, peas and lentils), soya, tofu and Quorn.

## How do I plan eating well before starting my treatment?

During your stem cell treatment and in the months to follow, you will probably have a lot to think about. It is important to keep looking after yourself and eating well needs to be a priority. Every day activities such as shopping, preparing and cooking meals may become more challenging due to side effects of treatment.

Whilst getting ready for treatment, it can be a good idea to take some time to start planning ahead in terms of your eating and drinking at home. Making sure you stock your cupboards, fridge and freezer with foods that are high in calories and protein will help you have easy access to food as you need it (suggestions and ideas for this can be found in the Macmillan booklet – The Building Up Diet).

## What snacks should I eat?

Keep a stock of snack foods that you enjoy. You can eat these between meals to help boost your daily intake and provide you with more calories and protein. Examples of some things you may consider are:

- Nuts
- Cheese
- Dried Fruit / tinned fruit / frozen fruit
- Crackers, crisps or breadsticks with dips
- Biscuits and cakes
- Cereals with whole milk
- Full fat yoghurt or fromage frais
- Ice cream
- Ready to eat custard and rice pudding pots
- Nourishing 'milky' drinks – such as hot chocolate, milkshakes, coffees made with full fat milk or fortified milk

You are welcome to bring snacks in to hospital with you. There will be a fridge in your room for you to use. You may be asked to sign a disclaimer form for certain foods that are brought in from home or not supplied by the hospital.

There are companies that supply nutritionally balanced frozen meals for direct delivery to your home (please see the 'Starting to Recover' section for details). Do not feel guilty about using 'ready meals' during this time as it is worth remembering that you are going through a process of treatment and recovery.

If you are interested in finding out more information about options available, please ask your dietitian or specialist nurse.

## Will I need nutritional supplement drinks/products?

The best way to get more nutrition in to your diet is with food and drinks. Some people may have already experienced unplanned weight loss and/or are struggling to maintain their weight. If you are concerned about this then please speak

to your dietitian who can assess your needs. They may recommend nutritional supplement drinks/products available to buy or on prescription.

## Will I need vitamin/mineral supplements?

For most people, a healthy, balanced diet that contains a range of fruit and vegetables will provide all the nutrients they need. Large doses of vitamins, minerals and other dietary supplements are usually not needed or recommended.

If you find it difficult to eat a balanced diet, it may help to take a general multivitamin or mineral supplement. Check with your doctor, nurse or dietitian before taking as high doses of vitamin and minerals can sometimes interfere with certain treatments.

## Part 2 – During Treatment

### How can I eat well during treatment?

During your stem cell transplant your immune system will be lowered due to high dose chemotherapy. Your body now needs more nutrients to help repair itself. At this time, there are many reasons why you may find it difficult to eat and drink.

Side effects that can lead to you eating less include:

- Nausea and vomiting
- Lack of appetite
- Dry mouth and thick saliva
- Sore mouth and throat (mucositis)
- Oral thrush
- Taste changes
- Increased sensitivity to smells
- Feeling tired all the time (fatigue)
- Constipation/Diarrhoea
- Pain
- Low mood
- Environment (being in hospital)
- Menu boredom

Early identification and management of these side effects can ease symptoms and reduce their effects on your ability to eat and drink. Therefore, it is important that you discuss any side effects you may be experiencing with your nurse, doctor or dietitian.

Ongoing poor nutritional intake can lead to weight and muscle loss. Although you may be finding it difficult to eat, it is important to remember that good nutrition and maintaining your weight will help you recover more quickly.

Helpful hints for you during your hospital stay:

- Eat what you can, when you can – make the most of times when you feel like eating
- Eat little and often
- Have a variety of snacks easily accessible – snacks are available on the ward between meals both day and night
- Choose higher energy (calorie) menu options
- Make the most of your food (see previous section)
- Eat softer foods if easier to chew or if it is painful to swallow
- Ask about other alternative menu options available in hospital
- Maintain good oral hygiene
- Try to have nourishing 'milky' drinks throughout the day
- Do not forget to drink plenty of fluids

## **How can my nutrition be supported during my hospital stay?**

Once you are admitted to hospital for your stem cell transplant you will be seen by the dietitian on the ward. They will discuss ways of supporting you to eat well when you may be experiencing side effects of the treatment. If you have been monitoring your weight it will be helpful to tell them of any weight loss already experienced. You will be routinely weighed on admission and throughout your stay.

## **How will I know if I need nutritional supplement drinks/products?**

Your dietitian will assess your nutritional needs and may suggest prescribing nutritional supplement drinks/products. These can be taken in addition to your usual food and drinks as a way to get extra nutrition into your diet.

## **Do I need to be aware of certain foods if my immune system is low?**

Many of the foods we eat contain small amounts of bacteria or fungi which normally would not cause our bodies a problem. However, during treatment you may be less able to fight off infection that these bacteria and fungi may cause with a weakened immune system. There are a number of measures you can easily take to reduce this risk.

- Wash your hands before you handle food
- Use foods before the use by date
- Store food and drink at the correct temperature
- Cook foods thoroughly
- Wash all raw fruit and vegetables prior to eating them

You can also reduce your risk in hospital by avoiding the following higher risk foods:

- Mould-ripened soft cheeses
- Probiotic drinks/yoghurts
- Smoked fish
- Bruised fruit and vegetables
- Unpasteurised dairy and meat pates

All hospital catering meals and snacks are suitable for patients when their immune systems are low. Please speak to your dietitian or specialist nurse if you have any questions about going home with a low immune system.

## **Will a feeding tube be discussed?**

Stem cell transplantation causes side effects that can make eating more difficult. If there is a concern about your weight loss or you are

finding it difficult to swallow, the need for a feeding tube may be discussed with you by the medical team.

A nasogastric tube (NG tube) is a small tube that carries food, fluid and medicine to the stomach through your nose. You may still be able to take some food by eating normally, and then top up your nutrition by having the rest as liquid feed through the tube. NG feeding can remove some of the anxiety and pressure around not being able to eat enough.

Whilst you are having tube feeding you will be under the care of the dietitian who will advise how much feed you need. The NG tube can be easily removed when it is no longer required.

## Part 3 – Starting to Recover

### How can I maintain good nutrition when I go home?

Once your blood counts have reached a safe level and you have completed your treatment, your clinical team will begin planning your discharge home. It may be daunting to talk about going home after spending time in hospital.

Family and friends might expect your discharge from hospital to mean you have fully recovered. However, it is common for side effects such as tiredness, nausea, reduced appetite and weight loss to continue for some time after you go home. During this time, you may find that your appetite is returning but not yet back to normal. The benefits of having good nutrition will be to:

- Maintain your weight
- Aid recovery
- Increase your energy and strength

If you are struggling to eat enough, aim to have small, frequent meals and snacks in between. Now is the time to use the store cupboard and frozen foods you stocked up on before treatment.

If your dietitian has recommended that you continue taking nutritional supplement drinks/products once home, then it is best to continue taking these while you wait for your appetite to improve.

It is important to continue to monitor your weight weekly and record it. This can be done at home if you have scales or when you come for an outpatient appointment. If you notice weight loss, please let your specialist nurse or dietitian know.

### Record of my weight

You can record your weight on this chart. It is recommended you do this every week. Where possible, weigh yourself on the same scales, and at the same time of day. The best time for this may be in the morning before you have breakfast.

Date	Weight

## Thoughts and Questions

With so much to think about it may be difficult to remember questions you may like to ask. Please use this space to make a note of any thoughts or questions that you may have and bring it with you to your appointments.

## Information support and useful links:

**Bloodwise** – funds research into the causes and treatment of blood cancers. Provides publications on stem cell transplants

0808 2080 888 (Free phone support line)

[www.bloodwise.org.uk](http://www.bloodwise.org.uk)

**Anthony Nolan** – support for patients and family going through a bone marrow or stem cell transplant

0303 303 0303

[www.anthonynolan.org](http://www.anthonynolan.org)

### **Myeloma UK**

0800 980 3332

[www.myeloma.org.uk](http://www.myeloma.org.uk)

### **Lymphoma Association**

0808 808 5555

[www.lymphomas.org.uk](http://www.lymphomas.org.uk)

### **Macmillan Cancer Support**

0808 808 0000 (Free phone number)

[www.macmillan.org.uk](http://www.macmillan.org.uk)

**BDA (British Dietetic Association)** – further diet information

[www.bda.uk.com](http://www.bda.uk.com)

**BAPEN** – Malnutrition self screening tool

[www.bapen.org.uk](http://www.bapen.org.uk)

**Wiltshire Farm Foods** – meal delivery service

0800 077 3100

[www.wiltshirefarmfoods.com](http://www.wiltshirefarmfoods.com)

**Oakhouse Foods** - meal delivery service

0333 370 6700

[www.oakhousefoods.co.uk](http://www.oakhousefoods.co.uk)

**Parsley Box** - meal delivery service

0131 326 0131

[www.parsleybox.com](http://www.parsleybox.com)

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