

# Nutrition, Appetite, and Weight Loss



Your appetite and weight may be affected by hepatitis C therapy. You may be nauseous or lose your appetite, your food might taste funny, and you might lose weight. But right now you need all the strength you can get, so try to eat well. This is a great time to establish healthy eating habits.

## Nausea

The American Cancer Society recommends the following for nausea<sup>1</sup>:

- Avoid acidic, spicy, sweet, and greasy foods.
- Try eating 6 to 8 small meals a day.
- Drink cool, clear beverages, such as water with a slice of citrus fruit.
- Don't drink alcoholic beverages, and limit your intake of caffeinated drinks.
- Try flat ginger ale.
- If nausea is a problem in the morning, try dry foods, such as toast or crackers.
- Avoid unpleasant sights, tastes, and smells. Grill outdoors to minimize odors.
- Try eating food cool or at room temperature.
- Rest in a chair after eating, but don't lie flat for at least 2 hours.
- Wear loose-fitting clothes.

## Weight Loss

Most weight loss usually occurs during the first 2 to 3 months of therapy,<sup>2</sup> and should taper off. If you are losing too much too fast, or continue to lose weight:

- Exercise just before you eat.<sup>3</sup>
- Try prepared meals or juice-based oral supplements.<sup>3</sup>
- Get enough protein: switch to chicken, fish, beans, or peanut butter if red meat tastes bitter.
- Diet supplements that are lactose-based are not as good as fruit-based<sup>3</sup>; but if you prefer the taste, take full strength or dilute with skim milk if the drink is too rich.<sup>4</sup>
- Eat foods you like, and keep them available to snack on.
- Eat when you can, whenever you're hungry.
- Instead of water, drink sports drinks, fruit juices, and carbonated beverages that have calories. Do not drink coffee, tea, or diet beverages.<sup>3</sup>

## Taste Alterations

Food sometimes tastes slightly different for patients on therapy. Try these tips:

- Use plastic utensils instead of metal.
- Eat and drink slowly to give your body time to digest.<sup>1</sup>
- Use a fan or keep a window open to minimize smells.
- Avoid sweet, fried, or fatty foods.<sup>1</sup>

This information is not intended as a substitute for professional medical advice. Consult your health care provider for individualized information about your therapy. Your health care provider should be your primary source of information about your medical condition and treatment.

- Drink cranberry juice, lemonade, or other liquids<sup>1</sup> a half hour before meals.
- Eat foods cold or at room temperature.<sup>1</sup>
- Eat popcorn.
- Try hard sour candies, mints, dark chocolate, citrus sorbet, or bubble gum.

## Use Your Head: Eat Well

This may be one of the most important times of your life to really think about nutrition. Now is the time to get good food into your body and get into habits that will last a long time.

- Avoid fast food—it's full of grease and calories.
- Avoid "empty" calories like cakes, cookies, and candy (unless you're losing weight and you need those extra calories).
- Do not drink alcohol (this includes beer and wine). Alcohol has specifically been identified as having a negative effect on patients with hepatitis C.<sup>5</sup>
- If you don't have the energy to shop and cook, identify someone who can help you, to ensure that you have the help you need to get the food and meals you need to eat right.

## Talk To Your Health Care Provider

- If you've lost 5 pounds or more,<sup>4</sup> tell your doctor—you may need to be on a high-calorie diet or lower therapeutic dose.
- Keep a food diary and keep track of your weight.
- If you are losing weight due to nausea and vomiting or diarrhea, mention this to your doctor; there are drugs that can help these symptoms.
- Ask your doctor if you should take a multi-vitamin or other supplement.
- Consider getting a recommendation from your doctor to a dietitian or nutritionist.

Copyright © 2007, Schering Corporation, Kenilworth, NJ 07033. All rights reserved. Printed in USA PGN0734 7/07

## References

1. American Cancer Society Web site. Available at: <http://www.cancer.org>. Accessed June 23, 2003.
2. HepNet. The Web site of The Hepatitis Information Network. *Hepatitis Knowledge Newsletter*. Available at: <http://www.hepnet.com/hkn/c18.html>. Accessed June 23, 2003.
3. Kiley KE, Gale DM. Nursing management of patients with malignant melanoma receiving adjuvant alpha interferon-2b. *Clin J Oncol Nurs*. 1998;2:11-16.
4. Sandstrom SK. Nursing management of patients receiving biological therapy. *Semin Oncol Nurs*. 1996;12:152-162.
5. Wendland BE. Nutritional guidelines for persons infected with the hepatitis C virus: a review of the literature. *Can J Diet Pract Res*. 2001;62:7-15.

Be In  
Charge®