

Diet and nutrition

When you have myeloma it is important to try to eat a well balanced diet, and in particular to maintain a good fluid intake. You may find that your appetite and your dietary requirements will vary and there may be specific times that eating and drinking may be difficult.

What is a well balanced diet?

A well balanced diet is one that will provide you with everything you need to keep your body working well and should consist of foods from all the major food groups – it will also be rich in all the essential vitamins and minerals.

Eating a well balanced diet will help to maintain muscle mass and strength, increase energy levels and may help recovery after treatment. It may also help the immune system to function more effectively.

A well balanced diet should include:

- **Protein** – to help build new cells and replace old ones. Foods that contain protein include: milk, cheese, nuts and fish.
- **Carbohydrates** – to provide energy. Foods that contain carbohydrates include: bread, pasta and rice.
- **Fats** – another source of energy. There are three major categories of fats – saturated, polyunsaturated, and monounsaturated. Saturated fats are found mainly in animal and dairy products and should be eaten only in small amounts. Polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats are the two unsaturated fats. They are found mainly in many fish, nuts, seeds and oils from plants. There is some evidence to show that polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats may help to lower blood cholesterol levels.
- **Fibre** – to maintain a healthy digestive system. Foods that are high in fibre include: bran, whole wheat bread and cereals, as well as most fruit and vegetables. It is recommended that you eat five portions of fruit and vegetables per day.
- **Vitamins and minerals** – for a variety of functions such as helping to increase the body's resistance to infection and maintaining healthy nerves and tissues.
- **An adequate fluid intake** – three litres per day is recommended if you have myeloma to help keep the kidneys working well, any fluid is acceptable but coffee and alcohol should be taken in moderation as they can cause dehydration

Myeloma UK
Broughton House
31 Dunedin Street
Edinburgh EH7 4JG

Tel: 0131 557 3332
Fax: 0131 556 9785
Myeloma Infoline:
0800 980 3332

www.myeloma.org.uk

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What makes a well balanced diet difficult to maintain?

Myeloma and its treatment can cause several temporary complications that can make maintaining a balanced diet difficult. These can include:

- Loss of appetite
- Taste changes – often a slightly metallic taste after chemotherapy
- Sore dry mouth
- Nausea and vomiting
- Tiredness or fatigue
- Diarrhoea or constipation
- Anxiety and depression
- Steroids can increase appetite and lead to weight gain.

Is a special diet necessary?

There is usually no specific long-term diet recommended for you if you have myeloma, but there may be periods when changes are necessary. In particular you may need to alter your diet when your white cell count is low (your doctor may say that you are 'neutropenic') as this means that you may be at an increased risk of picking up infections. This is particularly the case after high dose chemotherapy and stem cell transplant.

Some foods may carry an increased risk of infection so, in order to reduce this risk, after high-dose therapy or when your white cell count is low, a 'clean diet' is usually recommended until the white cell count is normal again.

Your hospital should provide you with a list of the foods that should be avoided during this time. However, in general a clean diet avoids 'high-risk' foods such as: raw or undercooked eggs, unpasteurised dairy products, live yoghurts, soft / blue cheeses, shell fish, pate, mayonnaise, meringue, takeaway foods (especially rice) or foods that have not been freshly prepared. As always, it is important to handle and store food correctly and use it by the 'best before' or 'sell by' date.

As with other types of cancer, there is increasing interest in alternative diets e.g. the Gerson diet. As these diets have not yet been properly studied, their real effect is uncertain. If you are considering such a diet you should discuss it with your doctor or a specialised dietician.

Tips to maintain a healthy diet

Sometimes, particularly if you are receiving treatment and are feeling poorly, it may be difficult to ensure that you are eating enough and maintaining a well balanced diet. At these times it is important to eat what you can and try not to worry too much.

Tips that may help include:

- If your appetite is poor try eating small amounts regularly throughout the day
- A sore mouth or taste changes can put you off eating – ensure that you are using any treatments for your mouth as prescribed by your doctor and try to keep your mouth fresh and clean.
- Light gentle exercise (e.g. walking) may stimulate your appetite as can a glass of sherry before your meal.
- If necessary, to help gain weight, try supplementing your diet using every day food such as cream, butter and sugar.
- Dietary supplements may be useful to ensure that you are receiving all the essential vitamins and minerals. Nowadays most cancer centres have access to a specialised dietician who can assess your nutritional status and prescribe

supplements if necessary. Ask your doctor if you think that you would benefit from seeing a dietician.

- If you are suffering from fatigue try to cook larger portions and freeze for another day. Ask other people to help you with cooking and shopping.
- Even if you are unable to face food it is important to maintain a high fluid intake.

About this Infosheet

The information in this Infosheet is not meant to replace the advice of your medical team. They are the people to ask if you have questions about your individual situation. All Myeloma UK's publications are extensively reviewed by patients and healthcare professionals prior to publication.

Other information available from Myeloma UK

Myeloma UK has a range of Essential Guides, Infoguides and Infosheets available, covering many areas of myeloma, its treatment and management. To order your free copies, contact the **Myeloma Infoline** on **0800 980 3332**. This information is also available 24/7 on our website at www.myeloma.org.uk

If you would like to talk to someone about any aspect of myeloma, its treatment and management, call the **Myeloma Infoline** on **0800 980 3332**. Your call will be answered by Myeloma Nurse Specialists who are supported by medical and scientific advisors. The Myeloma Infoline is open from Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm, and is free to phone from anywhere in the UK. From outside the UK, call +44 131 557 3332 (charged at normal rate).

Authors: Ellen Watters RGN, Mandy Calder RGN Myeloma UK
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