

Initial dietary advice for people with anorexia nervosa

Information for patients



This leaflet aims to give some helpful guidance and support to those who are awaiting input for their eating disorder. You may have disordered eating and may have experienced some weight loss. This leaflet should give you some help to take home.

The aim is to gradually introduce more food and fluid into your daily intake. We suggest that this is done over 3 meals with snacks in between; starting to build on the portion size you are managing at present.

To do this in the best way, the food that is offered needs to provide everything that will support the body to recover safely and to become healthy again.

There are specific foods that we would strongly recommend are included each day to support the body's recovery. These include cow's milk unless there is a diagnosed allergy.



It is important to adopt a structured approach where meals and snacks are planned.

Menu for the week						
	Breakfast	Snack	Lunch	Snack	Dinner	Supper
Mon						
Tues						
Wed						
Thurs						
Fri						

In addition to your current intake:

- Establish 3 regular meals and snacks in-between. This will reduce periods of fasting between meals and help prevent low blood sugars and energy.
- All meals should be based around starchy carbohydrate (bread, potato, pasta, rice or couscous) with added protein (chicken, fish, red meat, pulses or nuts) with some vegetables and fruit as appropriate to ensure a balanced nutritional intake.
- Aim for at least 3 portions per day of dairy foods e.g. milk, yoghurt, cheese, etc. This will ensure a good intake of phosphate - a mineral which is beneficial to the body as you start eating more.
- Milk can be flavoured or taken in hot chocolate or as a milky coffee.

You should:

- Avoid low fat foods or diet versions of foods
- Limit fruit juice to 1 – 2 glasses per day initially
- Limit fizzy drinks initially
- Do not drink more than one glass of fluid with your meals
- Use appropriate-sized plates and utensils
- Have a distraction for after eating as these can help you manage distress (e.g. music, TV, games, conversation or arts and crafts)
- Eat regularly- this is important even if you don't feel hungry.

Hunger and feeling full

- Be aware that you may not feel hungry before food- this does not mean you shouldn't eat.
- You may also notice your hunger becoming quite strong as you eat - this can be scary but again is not a reason not to eat.
- You may feel full after only a small amount of food- this is due to slow gut transit. Despite this you still need to eat.

Gastrointestinal (GI) changes and symptoms

- Feeling full can cause pain and discomfort. To ease these symptoms try using a hot water bottle.
- You may notice bloating and constipation as you begin to eat more. You may find wearing loose clothing more comfortable.
- Other GI complaints such as reflux and indigestion can also be present.
- Once you are able to eat a sufficient amount of energy through consistent regular eating, all of the above symptoms will start to ease as your gut function improves.

Your doctor may recommend a prescription for vitamins to support you as you begin to eat more.

Weight gain

- At first, when you start to eat more, you may notice your weight increases more than you expect. This can be related to fluid retention and glycogen reformation. In addition this could be due to low metabolic rate which in time will speed up. You may then notice your weight gain becomes slower or stabilises.
- During recovery we would expect a 0.5-1kg weight gain per week.
- An optimal weight is individual and this will be advised by your clinicians.

Re-feeding syndrome

This rare condition occurs when food is introduced too quickly following a period of restriction or malnourishment.

It is characterised by a movement of electrolytes from the blood into the cells which can cause clinical symptoms if not treated.

Following the advice described in this leaflet will reduce your risk of developing this.

