

Patient information

Nutrition: Eating to Keep Healthy



Why is a good diet important?

A balanced and healthy diet is important for providing the human body with all the essential ingredients it needs to be able to function effectively.

This is especially important in people with a long-term lung condition, because being breathless uses up more energy per day and can lead to significant weight loss.

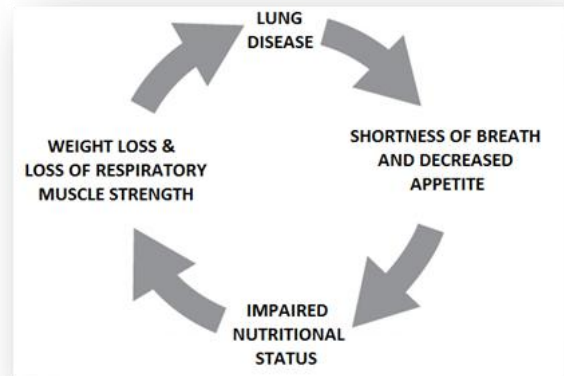
Patients with lung conditions often fall into 2 categories:

- those that lose significant amounts of weight
- those that gain significant amounts of weight

This leaflet will try to explain why this happens and how you can help to maintain a healthy diet and weight.

Why have I lost weight?

- burning more calories when breathless
- eating less because eating makes you breathless
- poor appetite due to medications
- poor motivation
- difficult to shop for food due to fatigue and breathlessness



Risks of being underweight:

- weaken immune system
- reduced energy reserves to fight infection
- lead to loss of respiratory muscle mass
- higher risk of falls

How can I gain weight?

- graze - eat little and often rather than big meals
- make sure you don't skip meals
- plan meals in advance and batch cook
- choose foods that are high in calories
- add extra protein and calories to your food (butter, cream, cheese)
- exercise gently to improve your appetite
- add nutritional supplement drinks to your diet - with guidance from your GP

If you have suddenly lost weight, without trying, it is very important that you seek medical advice.

Why have I gained weight?

- lack of exercise because of breathlessness and fatigue
- having to take regular doses of steroids
- steroids making your body retain fluid
- anxiety and stress can lead to increased consumption of sugary foods and drink

Risks of being overweight:

- weight carried around the neck, chest and tummy can make breathing more difficult
- makes the heart and lungs work harder
- restricts diaphragm movement - breathing more difficult
- makes it harder to keep active
- can increase the risk of developing diabetes and heart disease
- more at risk of developing acid reflux and sleep apnoea

How can I lose weight?

It is very important that you do not cut out any food groups when trying to lose weight as this can lead to you not receiving essential nutrients and minerals.

- seek advice from your GP, practice Nurse, FeelGoodSuffolk or referral to a dietician
- eat more high-fibre and high-protein foods
- reduce your fizzy drink and alcohol intake
- reduce fried foods
- eat smaller portions or reduce your plate size
- keep active to help burn calories and help digestion. Even the smallest amount of regular activity will help burn calories.

How to Maintain a Healthy Diet

In order to maintain a healthy diet and weight it is important that your diet contains elements from all of the main food groups: carbohydrates, proteins and minerals, dairy and fats.

Carbohydrates

These come in two forms: **simple** and **complex**.

Simple carbohydrates are foods that are high in sugar such as cakes, biscuits, sweets and crisps. These are good for giving a quick, short-term energy 'fix', but can be high in calories and low in nutritional value.



Complex carbohydrates however, are high in starch, fibre, calcium and iron and will give you a sustained energy boost. These include foods such as bread, rice, pasta, potatoes and cereals.

Proteins and Minerals

Foods containing essential proteins include fish, meat, eggs, beans, pulses, cheese, milk and soya. They are especially important in helping:

- to build muscle mass
- support your immune system
- maintaining growth to help with repair

Essential minerals needed include selenium, iron and zinc. These help with boosting your immune system, oxygen transportation and healing.

Dairy

Dairy is an excellent source of Calcium and Vitamin D which help to maintain strong and healthy bones.

These are especially important to have in your diet if you have a lung condition because long-term use of steroids (used to treat your condition) may increase your risk of osteoporosis.

However, please be aware that too much dairy in your diet (especially when you have a chest infection) can make your phlegm very thick and sticky and difficult to clear.

If you have a dairy allergy, intolerance or consume a plant-based only diet there are plenty of dairy free alternatives available in supermarkets. Just make sure that these alternatives are fortified with calcium and vitamins.

Fats: Omega-3 and Omega-6

Small amounts of the right types of fats (omega-3 and omega-6) are important in our diet. They contain:

- Vitamins A and E - help fight infection
- Vitamin D - maintain strong, healthy bones
- Vitamin K - help with healing and regulate clotting

These fats can be found in foods such as oily fish, seeds, nuts, poultry, eggs and vegetable oils.

Sodium (salt)

Recommendation: your maximum daily intake of salt should be no more than 6 grams per day.

Consuming too much salt can make your body retain fluid. This can make your feet, hands and tummy swell, which can, in turn, make it more difficult for you to move about and breathe.

Other Things that can Affect Our Nutrition

Fluid Intake

Recommendation:

You should aim to drink 6-8 glasses (2 litres) of fluid per day (unless you are on a fluid restriction)

This will help to keep your body functioning well and help to keep your phlegm thinner and easier to clear from your chest.

Be aware that too much tea and coffee (caffeine based drinks) can make you dehydrated.

Top tip: If you struggle to drink enough, put a 2 litre bottle of water in the fridge and then every time you have a drink, use the water from this bottle. This will help you to keep a track of what you drink.

Alcohol Consumption

Recommendation: You should consume no more than 14 units of alcohol per week.

Regularly exceeding this limit may:

- lower your immune system and increase your risk of infection
- interfere with your medication (especially antibiotics)
- cause dehydration

Diabetes

Type 1 Diabetes

- no real limits as to what you can eat
- flexible insulin regimes and pumps mean that you can fit your diabetes treatment around your current eating habits

Tips:

- try to include some carbohydrates in diet otherwise the insulin you are taking may cause your sugar levels could drop too low
- choose healthier foods such as wholegrain carbohydrates, starchy foods, fruit & veg, unsweetened yoghurt/milk, nuts and seeds
- try to avoid high sugar drinks and fruit juices as these can dramatically increase your blood sugar levels
- carbohydrate counting helps to keep blood sugar levels steady. It is important to match your insulin intake to the amount of carbohydrates you eat/drink

Educational courses available for Type 1 Diabetes:

DAFNE - nationally approved education course for those with Type 1 diabetes

Please speak to your GP or Diabetes Nurse for availability and possible referral onto this course.

Type 2 Diabetes

Often caused by physical inactivity, being overweight, hormonal or insulin issues

Managing Type 2 diabetes is often helped by adopting a healthier diet

- limit high sugar foods such as sweets, chocolate, biscuits, cake, smoothies and fruit juices
- limit red and processed meat and processed carbohydrates (white bread)
- limit added sugar, salt, alcohol and saturated fats

Tips:

- choose healthy carbohydrates (wholegrain rice, pasta, bread)
- choose fresh or frozen fruit & veg, pulses, beans, lentils
- choose dairy such as unsweetened milk and yoghurt

Educational courses available for Type 2 Diabetes:

DESMOND - education course for people living with Type 2 Diabetes

NHS Diabetes Prevention Program - 9 month education and weight management course for pre-diabetics

Please speak to your GP or Diabetes Nurse for availability and possible referral onto these courses.

Eating and Drinking

- eating and drinking can be very difficult when you are breathless
- it requires you to hold your breath when you swallow, which can increase anxiety.
- some people will avoid eating and drinking because of this.

Remember you need fuel to **function** and **fight infection!!**

Therefore, try the following:

- clear your airways before you eat
- always eat sitting upright
- eat food that are easy to chew
- always chew your food thoroughly
- limit beverages until after a meal

Don't forget, there are no set rules on eating 3 meals a day, try eating little and often instead!!

Coughing or Choking when Eating or Drinking?

Being breathless can make it difficult to swallow effectively and can make food or drink 'go down the wrong way'. This causes the food or drink to be inhaled onto your lungs and may cause a chest infection.

If this happens to you regularly, please make an appointment with your GP to check that your swallow reflex is working properly.

Feeling Over-Full or Bloated after a Meal?

A distended tummy can restrict the movement of your diaphragm, making you uncomfortable and short of breath after eating. Therefore, try:

- watching your portion size
- avoiding fizzy drinks - they fill your tummy with air
- cutting down on foods that are known to cause bloating such as onions, cauliflower, cabbage and beans
- going for a short, gentle walk after a meal

Gastro-Oesophageal Reflux (GORD)

This is a condition where acid can travel from the stomach, back up the oesophagus (food pipe) towards the throat.

If left untreated, it can lead to chronic cough, hoarse voice, throat irritation, difficulties with breathing (asthmatic symptoms) or pneumonia and can damage lung tissue.

Tips to reduce stomach acid:

- reduce alcohol intake
- reduce or stop smoking
- reduce acid, spicy and fatty foods
- reduce caffeine intake
- reduce the size of your meals or eat little and often
- don't eat too late into the evening

In some cases, medication may be appropriate to help with this issue. Please speak to your GP or Pharmacist for advice.

Top Tips for Breathless Days

- eat smaller sized meals or graze through the day
- eat slowly and take smaller mouthfuls
- eat soft foods that are moist and don't need much chewing
- have nutritious meals such as milk, smoothies, juices and soups
- snack more often
- pre-prepare snacks or light meals which can be stored in the fridge or freezer
- make a flask of hot drink and keep it close to where you sit
- if you struggle with nausea try drinking ginger or peppermint tea and avoid eating spicy or greasy food

Useful contacts

For Pulmonary Rehabilitation enquiries:

Suffolk Community Healthcare Care Co-ordination Centre (CCC)

Tel: 0300 123 2425

E-mail: pulmonaryrehabilitation@wsh.nhs.uk

Clinical research

West Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust is actively involved in clinical research. Your doctor, clinical team or the research and development department may contact you regarding specific clinical research studies that you might be interested in participating in. If you do not wish to be contacted for these purposes, please email info.gov@wsh.nsh.uk. This will in no way affect the care or treatment you receive.

Accessibility

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