

Service: Nutrition and Dietetics

The importance of eating well in hospital

Information for kidney patients



Why have I been given this leaflet?

Everyone who comes into hospital is checked for risk of malnutrition. You may have been given this leaflet if you are at risk of malnutrition or have a small appetite at the moment. Eating well can help you to get better.

What is malnutrition?

Malnutrition is when you do not get all the nutrients (e.g. energy or protein) your body needs to function properly.

Malnutrition can occur if you have:

- A low body weight.
- Recently lost a lot of weight.
- Been eating much less than usual.
- A high need for nutrition due to illness or surgery.

Malnutrition increases the risk of problems such as:

- Infection.
- Falls.
- Pressure ulcers.
- Tiredness.
- Heart and breathing problems.
- Staying in hospital for longer.

Why is it important to eat well in hospital?

Eating well in hospital will reduce your risk of malnutrition and the problems which can happen because of this.

Eating better will help you to:

- Fight infection.
- Heal wounds and broken bones.
- Do more for yourself.
- Give you more strength to move around and breathe better.
- Stay in hospital for less time.

Ways to eat better

If you find you can't eat very much at meal times, here are some suggestions:

- Try eating smaller portions and more often.
- Ask for a glass of hot or cold milk between meals instead of tea or coffee.
- Have a biscuit or piece of cake with your drink between meals.
- Ask the nurse looking after you for a slice of toast or bowl of cereal and milk at bedtime. These foods are always available in the ward kitchen.
- Try to eat the protein portion of your meal first e.g. meat, chicken, fish, egg, cheese, beans.
- Try to eat a dessert also. Good choices are sponge and custard, crumble and custard, milk pudding, yoghurt or cheese and crackers.
- You may also be offered a special high energy drink such as Fortisip Compact Protein.

What could my friends and relatives bring in?

Visitors may like to bring in food to help you eat more. We have to be careful that foods brought in won't make you ill. For this reason, only foods which can be kept safely in your room may be brought in. Foods such as sandwiches and cream cakes need to be eaten immediately. They should not be kept for later.

Check with your nurse if some foods can be put in the fridge for eating later that day e.g. sealed individual pots of yoghurt, trifle, rice pudding, cheesecake. These should be labelled with your name and the use by date.

Here are some ideas for foods which can be brought in:

- Biscuits e.g. shortbread, digestives, custard creams, rich tea.
- Small boxes of breakfast cereals.
- Cake e.g. sponge, Madeira, blueberry or lemon muffins, flapjacks, doughnuts.
- Individual pots of long life rice puddings, custard.
- Breadsticks, popcorn, maize or wheat based crisps e.g. Mini Cheddars, Doritos, Sunbites.

If you usually follow a low potassium diet, it may not be necessary whilst you have a poor appetite. The snacks listed above are suitable for a low potassium diet. You can ask to speak to the dietitian if you are unsure.

If you normally follow a fluid restriction at home, then you will still need to continue with this in hospital, unless the doctor or dietitian advises you otherwise.

Suggested meal plan

Breakfast:

Porridge or cereal with milk.

Toast with butter and jam or marmalade.

Mid-morning:

Cup of hot or cold milk and biscuits.

Mid-day meal:

Hot meal or sandwich.

Sponge or crumble and custard or milk pudding or yoghurt or cheese and crackers.

Mid-afternoon:

Biscuits or cake with a cup of tea.

Evening meal:

Sandwich or hot meal.

Milk pudding, yoghurt or cheese and crackers.

During evening:

Cheese and crackers or a slice of toast and butter or a small bowl of cereal with milk.

Other tips

- Staff can be busy but they want to help you get better. Don't be afraid to ask for a drink of milk or if snacks are available. Milk, bread and breakfast cereals are usually available in the ward kitchens.
- Do ask the nurses if you need any help at mealtimes.
- If you are concerned you are still not eating enough, speak to your nurse about seeing a dietitian.

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www.nbt.nhs.uk/nutrition-dietetics

If you or the individual you are caring for need support reading this leaflet please ask a member of staff for advice.

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