



National **C**oncern for **H**ealthcare **I**nfections
Raising Awareness ~ Supporting You
Working for Patient Safety



Full Member

www.nc-hi.com

01942 208804

info@nc-hi.com

Nutrition and Lifestyle: Help with Prevention and Recovery

We are constantly exposed to bacterial, viral and a whole array of other potential pathogens, we even have them living inside us but when we are fit and healthy the body can generally deal with them effectively without us even being aware. Our immune and digestive system in particular work very closely, protecting our body from invaders. Most of us realise that a healthy diet and lifestyle are the key to good health and this is simply because it provides the body with the components it needs to run effectively and reduce toxic damage from excessive and negative stress.

For example virtually everything in the body is made, maintained and run by nutrients so a constant supply of a wide range of nutritional components such as proteins, minerals and vitamins are required. What we class as a healthy diet consisting of a balance of pure basic foods such as vegetables, fruit, nuts, seeds, pulses, whole grains and fish provides our body with the nutrients it needs to function. Diets high in saturated fat, refined carbohydrates, salt and low in fibre for example, not untypical in western society today are not only nutritionally low or imbalanced but they also put additional stress on the body. As well as the nutritional implications, poor diet can generate problems such as blood sugar imbalances, excess cholesterol and slow gut transit which increase the body's vulnerability to ill health. Processing requires more energy and resources but less nutritional support in being supplied, reducing the body's ability to cope with everyday exposure to pathogens.

Prevention:

Unfortunately if you are going into hospital the chances are you are not at your optimum level of health and fitness. You may have a condition that means you are less active or has changed your appetite. You may be on medication such as antibiotics that destroy your natural healthy gut flora enabling more pathogenic strains to flourish. When our health is compromised in some way this is the time when our body needs additional resources and reduced levels of stress but this can often be hard to achieve.

Apart from the hygiene advice suggested elsewhere on this website there are other things we can do to help out our natural defensive system, in particular the immune and digestive system.

Helping your Immune System Cope:

1. Eat plenty of plant based foods – vegetables, whole grains, nuts, seeds, pulses and fruit contain a wide range of nutrients that carry out a whole variety of functions. Plant based foods such as whole grains and vegetables are often a good source of slow release carbohydrate, providing constant energy with less chance of destabilising blood sugar levels. Many plant-based foods are high in the anti-oxidant range of minerals and vitamins which help protect and repair

Chair: Graham Tanner

Treasurer: Val Bradbury

Secretary: Bev Hurst

Honorary Patron: Baroness Masham of Ilton

NCHI

Working in collaboration with The 'Lee Spark' NF Foundation Reg: Charity No 1088094

the body from the toxic effects of oxidative stress, a destructive bi-product of metabolism, over-indulgence and stress. Plants also contain prebiotics, a fibre that is the main food source of healthy gut bacteria, which play a role in boosting immunity and preventing infection.

2. Eat fibre – Fibre is essential in a healthy gut transit. Often illness or treatment can slow down gut transit, enabling invading pathogens to take hold. Regular gut transit enables your digestive system to flush out harmful substances. A sluggish digestive system also finds it harder to process and absorb nutrients and maintain a health gut flora.
3. Eat foods high in omega 3 – Omega 3 has anti-inflammatory properties that could help reduce the damaging effects of infection. It can be found mainly in oily fish, eggs and certain nuts and seeds such as flax or linseed. Always crush seeds as whole seeds can pass through the digestive process intact.
4. Look after your gut flora – In our colon we have an area where bacteria can flourish. Our body needs certain bacteria to, amongst other things, help it process and absorb food, protect the gut mucosa and assist in the immune process. One of the key beneficial bacteria is called Bifidobacteria and low levels can leave space for less advantageous bacteria to take hold. Good gut bacteria in supplement form are often referred to as probiotics. Your inherent good gut bacteria thrive off prebiotics found in fruit and vegetables, particularly garlic and onions. If appetites are poor, supplements can be an option but it is important to get the right daily dosage.
5. Drink water – we are around 60% - 70% water and we dehydrate around 2 litres a day. Fluid is vital for many functions, in particular the transportation of nutrients, healthy blood pressure, removal of waste and potential pathogens. It is often suggested we require around 2 litres a day but this is dependent on things like temperature and level of activity. It may help to follow the 80/20 rule as there is less benefit drinking 2 litres a day if you also consume a bottle of wine and 10 cups of coffee! Make 80% of your fluid intake water and then this will give you a healthier ratio with other combined drinks.
6. Cut down on refined carbohydrates and saturated fats – Amongst other things they can imbalance blood sugar levels which can put additional stress on the body and drain energy levels at a time when it needs to preserve its resources. Some convenience and processed foods can be high in one or both but also very low nutritionally. High intakes can also slow gut transit, raise cholesterol levels, destroy healthy gut flora and provide nourishment for some pathogens including yeasts.
7. Manage stress – going into hospital can be a stressful event and often we feel frustrated and annoyed we cannot do the things we used to but stress can have a very negative effect on your body's ability to cope and generate additional toxins and strain on your immunity so management is important. The key is to be realistic, don't beat yourself up because you can't do much or feel you should be doing something. Put together a plan before your hospital trip to include making sure you have taken enough time off work, enlisted friends and family to help and put everything else on hold. Ill health can force you to see what is really important in life so aim to just deal with the priorities and accept everything else will have to wait. A good exercise for managing stress is the 4 D's – Deal it now, defer it, delegate it or dump it. If you are coping with a health problem, aim to make this the only thing you have to deal with. I

Chair: Graham Tanner

Treasurer: Val Bradbury

Secretary: Bev Hurst

Honorary Patron: Baroness Masham of Ilton

N C H I

Working in collaboration with The 'Lee Spark' NF Foundation Reg: Charity No 1088094

know life is not that simple but even off loading some things will help reduce stress.

8. Learn to relax – I know this may seem hard to do what with the anxiety of hospitals, health problems and all that comes with it but learning some simple relaxation techniques can really help you cope with your concerns. This is where alternative therapies such as massage and hypnotherapy can help but make sure you chose an approved therapist. You can also do simple breathing exercises as deep breathing is how the body naturally switches off stress. Place one hand on your abdomen and try slow deep breathing, feeling your hand rising and falling slowly. Focus on this when there is an immediate anxiety to deal with, it may help you cope better.

Initial Recovery:

After all the body has been through it's not surprising or unusual to feel lethargic and unwell after an illness especially if the illness has been severe or even life threatening. Coping with ill health is a real strain on the body's resources and it will take time to restore them back to health. Most people just want to get back to normal as quickly as possible but trying to do too much too soon can slow down the recovery process.

Helping your Body Recover:

1. Accept your limitations – pacing is an important part of recovery. If you try and do too much too soon then this may hinder or even prevent the recovery process. The problem is people tend to set their levels of ability by what they could do when they were well. To prevent overdoing things you must remain realistic and accept your new limitations.
2. Regain your appetite – chances are you will have probably lost weight and your appetite but nutrition is a vital part of the recovery process so it will help you if you can eat. Even if you don't feel much like eating try and eat regular micro-meals of nutritionally dense foods such as vegetables, fruit and fish. Try them in easy to eat ways in soups, mashed and smoothies for example.
3. Eat little and often – the digestive system needs time to get used to food again if you have not been eating so keep a supply of foods around you to nibble and graze on such as nuts, seeds, fruit and wholesome snack bars.
4. Restore good gut bacteria – you may feel like you have been through the wars and internally it has been a bit of a battle field as your body utilises all its defences to cope with surgery, ill health and expose to pathogens. Your gut flora plays an important role in assisting and it will also be feeling depleted and run down. Unfortunately this is just what opportunistic bacteria and pathogens are waiting for to enable them to come in and colonise. A healthy diet can help you restore your gut flora, particularly vegetables which contain gut nourishing prebiotics. You may also consider supplements to boost levels initially, we recommend getting professional advice from a healthcare professional, pharmacist or nutritional therapist.
5. Keep drinking water – Water helps maintain healthy energy levels which after a period of ill health are likely to be depleted. Excess caffeine and alcohol can dehydrate and fizzy drinks can raise blood sugar so remember the 80/20 rule.
6. Try to move – If you are feeling exhausted exercise is probably the last thing on your agenda and too much activity too soon can hinder recovery but there are very small movements you can do that may help you regain fitness. After a period of inactivity your muscles may have lost strength and tone. Try doing

Chair: Graham Tanner

Treasurer: Val Bradbury

Secretary: Bev Hurst

Honorary Patron: Baroness Masham of Ilton

N C H I

Working in collaboration with The 'Lee Spark' NF Foundation Reg: Charity No 1088094

small muscle clenching exercises which you can gradually increase as you recover. Start at your feet and work up your legs and different parts of the body trying to isolate individual muscles. Clench for a few seconds and relax but initially only do this for a very short amount of time, small steps are the key.

7. Aim to achieve nutritional density – pure basic foods such as vegetables and fish have a high ratio of nutrients including the antioxidants, energy boosters, prebiotics, anti-inflammatories and cell repairers.

Long-term Recovery:

Sadly we are aware that some people are still suffering from ill-health many years after they had a healthcare infection. From the individual reports the **NCHI** receive it appears an infection can leave you feeling unwell for a considerable time after the infection is gone. At present we are unaware of the extent of the impact of post-infection sufferers particularly with C.Diff so please help by filling in our survey...*which can be found on www.nc-hi.com under the research questionnaire tab.* Failing to fully recover from an illness can occur. Very simply put, the theory is if the body's resources, immunity and cellular health become depleted to such an extent it does not have the capacity to fully restore, only manage as best it can and get by. Probably the most well known examples are ME or chronic fatigue sufferers who often develop the condition after glandular fever or a traumatic event.

The problem is the body has to operate everyday but if rundown it cannot function to its full ability it can only deal with the priorities and have no resources left over to encourage repair and renewal so problems such as low energy or digestive problems remain. On top of that, your emotional health can also be greatly affected as you have been through one trauma and expected to recover. Instead you find yourself in a twilight world, falling into a grey area of healthcare, it is not an illness as such but it is definitely not good health making it difficult to find a treatment solution. You may have difficulty getting anyone to recognise you have a problem or feel that you should be able to “pull yourself together” and get over it.

If your medical advisors can find little reason for your continuing ill health there could still be things you could do to help yourself so never give up hope.

Long Term Recovery Action Plan:

1. Pacing – As mentioned earlier pacing is now an accepted form of managing chronic health conditions and is used very successfully most notably by some ME experts. Your doctor may be able to refer you to a specialist who can help you compile a pacing plan but you can try it yourself. Basically pacing is based around how much you can actually do each day and not how much you think you can or should be able to do. For example if you have a few days of bed rest which makes you feel a little revived, the next day as you are feeling so much better you will do a lot more than usual. This may give you an initial mental and physical boost but it may drain your resources to an extent that you put yourself back in bed again, where you have a few days rest, feel a bit better and repeat the cycle. With pacing the aim is to set a realistic daily plan that enables you to do a small amount each day without setting you back.

A daily pacing plan could read something like this –

Include – 10 minutes clenching exercises, 2 x 5 minute walks, 2 x 1 hour complete rest etc. This may not seem a lot but if even this makes you feel more exhausted the next day you may need to reduce your targets. This may seem demoralising

Chair: Graham Tanner

Treasurer: Val Bradbury

Secretary: Bev Hurst

Honorary Patron: Baroness Masham of Ilton

NCHI

Working in collaboration with The 'Lee Spark' NF Foundation Reg: Charity No 1088094

but once you have found your capability benchmark you can hope to improve on it rather than the slash and burn approach that leaves you feeling stuck in a rut.

2. Eat well – We have already mentioned lots about diet but to summarise a rebuilding diet is one that provides your body with the nutritional resources it needs to give you enough energy and body building nutrients to not only assist day to day running but also restore damaged and dysfunctional systems.

A healthy diet consists of a balanced range of –

Pure basic foods: vegetables, fruit, fish, meat, eggs, dairy, nuts, seeds and whole grains. The Food Standards Agency has plenty of leaflets and advice which can help you compile a healthy diet or seek help from a qualified dietician or nutritional therapist.

3. Don't forget happiness – It is so easy to feel fed-up, resentful and miserable and chances are you have every reason to be but encouraging feelings of pleasure and satisfaction are fundamental to good health and the best health tonic of all. It is ironic that feeling unhappy inhibits the recovery process as anxiety and stress dominate. It is hard to encourage happiness but see it as part of the recovery process. When looking at making your day to day life a more pleasant experience it is not about making great changes but small alterations to what you do. For example we are bombarded with miserable and violent news and fictional programmes but you don't need to watch them. Get friends to lend you pleasant or funny films or only watch interesting and fascinating programmes on television. Ask visitors to talk to you about the happy aspects of their life and find an activity or hobby you can enjoy within your limitations. Anything that diverts your mind temporarily can help you cope and assist the recovery process. When people have a big problem they often feel that it is not right to smile or laugh but in such circumstances these things are so much harder to achieve that they need to be cultivated.

4. Relax – If you are inactive because of ill health it might seem a bit stupid to suggest that you are not getting enough relaxation but you can still be anxious about your situation and this could add additional and continuous stress on your body. As already suggested alternative therapies or stress counselling may help you relieve some of this strain but there are plenty of relaxation techniques you can easily do at home such as deep breathing exercises. Positive visualisation is also good at encouraging relaxation. Our brain is always active so if there are things troubling us it will be hard to rest. One of the easiest visual exercises is to lie down, close your eyes and imagine you have just woken up in your perfect world, where are you, what does it look like, who else is there? Now run through a perfect day as if it is real time, what are you going to do, with whom? This may seem like rubbing in what you can no longer do but if you try it on a regular basis it can help you rest, relax and restore a small pocket of peace in your life. It may even demonstrate there are some things that you could do in reality that would make things a little easier.

5. Rebuild your internal defences – the digestive and immune systems interrelate so when thinking about restoration we need to consider things to boost both immunity and gut health. All the suggestions already mentioned can help in this process. Diet will help provides the resources need to enable appropriate functions and process to occur and help repair and restore. Positive stimulation will help build stamina and re-balance emotional health and relaxation will help reduce the negative effects of stress and anxiety. All these things also assist in the restoration of healthy gut flora, beneficial in restoring and

Chair: Graham Tanner

Treasurer: Val Bradbury

Secretary: Bev Hurst

Honorary Patron: Baroness Masham of Ilton

N C H I

Working in collaboration with The 'Lee Spark' NF Foundation Reg: Charity No 1088094

maintaining both digestive and immune health. Ill health can make it harder to be healthy, we often find it hard to eat, smile or stay active but any small changes we can do to reduce internal pressures and provide appropriate resources could help. The body has a fantastic inbuilt repair system but it needs us to provide the right environment and resources. Sadly for a few this may never be enough to provide a full recovery but physically, it may help improve your situation and mentally, help bring back an element of control over the situation.

It is always advised that professional medical advice is obtained on all personal health matters. The information given here is a general guideline only. Any changes to diet or health regime should be done so under the supervision of a health professional.

Neither the publisher, or author accepts any legal responsibility for any personal injury or other damage or loss arising from the use or misuse of the information supplied.

Liz Tucker
On behalf of **NCHI**

Chair: Graham Tanner

Treasurer: Val Bradbury
Honorary Patron: Baroness Masham of Ilton

Secretary: Bev Hurst

NCHI

Working in collaboration with The 'Lee Spark' NF Foundation Reg: Charity No 1088094