Nutrition Guidance for Positive Women

Taking Care of Yourself

Learning of your HIV-positive status can be frightening and stressful, but remember, YOU ARE NOT ALONE! HIV has spread quickly among all women: single, married, straight, lesbian, teenager, or grandmother. Recently, there has been evidence showing that HIV disease may progress faster in women. The study compared HIV positive women and men, with similar CD4 counts and viral loads. The women seemed to begin having opportunistic infections sooner. The results of the study suggest that women need to be treated earlier. Additional studies are being done as this is being written.

It is common for women to take care of others before they take care of themselves. But being an HIV-positive woman you have your own special needs. They are just as important as others and demand 100% of your attention. Taking care of yourself means:

❖ Getting enough rest
❖ Regular exercise (more than just walking)
❖ Eating a healthy diet
❖ Taking all of your medicine, at the right times
❖ Making your own needs a high priority

Following these suggestions will help you live with HIV disease, have more energy, and stay well. The most important thing to remember is that you need to take care of yourself, even when the demands from family, partners, parents and others seem to be just as important.

❖ To help you deal with stress, request handouts from your provider from Section 3.
❖ For tips on how to eat well and plan meals safely and on a budget, ask your provider for the tip pages in Sections 3 and 4.
❖ Also, think about preparing meals when you feel well, have more energy, or have more time, and freeze them in meal sized portions for later use. Meals are safe in the freezer for at least two months.
❖ Other options include home delivered meal programs if you are not able to prepare healthful meals for yourself.
❖ In some areas, there are group meal programs where you need to go to the location, and a meal is prepared for you. Ask your provider or case manager if these programs are in your area.
❖ If you cannot afford food, ask about food pantries and soup kitchens, WIC, and Food Stamps.

Keep learning all you can about good nutrition and health. After all it is your life...enjoy every minute of it.
Special Nutritional Considerations: Pregnancy

Giving birth to a child is a special event in a woman's life, but is stressful to the body. This is especially true for an HIV-positive woman. As soon as you know you are pregnant, it is vital that you receive prenatal care immediately.

Since the body is stressed during pregnancy, it is easier for a pregnant woman to get sick. This is one of many important reasons to eat well and rest during your pregnancy. During pregnancy, you need to increase your usual healthy dietary intake by about 300 calories and 10 grams of protein a day. An extra sandwich a day can do this for you. Use the food guide for pregnancy at the end of this section to meet these needs. It is recommended that women gain 25-35 pounds over the course of the pregnancy. Most women gain 5 pounds the first three months, 10-15 pounds the second three months, and up to 15 pounds in the last three months, when the baby is growing the fastest. Discuss how much YOU need to gain with your health care provider, Registered Dietitian or other nutrition professional. The amount of weight gain will change depending on your age, your weight before pregnancy, and other factors.

There are other problems that can occur with any pregnancy, including high blood pressure, constipation, heartburn, and high blood sugar. Your provider will check for these problems during many of your visits. Should any of these problems occur, they can be controlled through diet and/or medication and should be discussed with your health care provider.

To give you the extra vitamins and minerals needed during pregnancy, many health care providers prescribe a pre-natal vitamin and mineral supplement. Be sure to take this pill with food. If you are given extra iron, increase your fluid and fiber intake to avoid constipation. This means drinking lots of water or fruit juice (not soda), and including fruits and vegetables in most of your meals and snacks.

Be sure to discuss any alternative therapies with your health care provider, including large doses of any vitamin or mineral supplements, other HIV medicines, over-the-counter medicines, herbal therapies, and acupuncture. More is NOT always better and can be harmful to the baby. Remember to talk with your health care provider about any cultural or religious practices, including fasts, which affect your diet.
In addition, limit or stay away from caffeine. If you must have some, try to have no more than 8 ounces (1 small cup) of caffeinated coffee or tea, soda (Pepsi, Coca-cola, Mountain Dew, Mellow Yellow, Dr. Pepper and others), or chocolate-containing beverages a day. One to 2 cups of coffee have been shown to negatively effect the outcomes of births. Also, the effect of caffeine lasts 20 times longer for a fetus than for an adult. Limit chocolate candy too. Cigarettes, alcohol and street drugs can cause permanent damage to your baby, and should be avoided.

Once your baby is born, do not be too anxious to lose the extra weight you may have gained. You will lose 15-20 pounds right after the baby is born. For the rest of the weight loss, discuss a slow weight loss plan (about a half to one pound a week), with your health care provider or Dietitian. This will allow you to maintain your muscle, and eat enough of the foods your body needs to stay healthy and give you energy to care for your baby.

**FOOD GUIDE FOR PREGNANCY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FOOD GROUP</th>
<th>SERVING SIZE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bread, Cereal, Pasta &amp; Rice</td>
<td>1 slice bread</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least 9 servings</td>
<td>1/2 hamburger or hot dog bun, or English muffin</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3-4 saltines</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1/2 cup cooked cereal (2 serving spoonfuls)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3/4 - 1 cup dry cereal (small bowl)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fruits &amp; Vegetables</td>
<td>3/4 cup juice (small glass)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least 6 servings total</td>
<td>1 piece fresh fruit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1/2 cup canned fruit (small bowl)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1/4 cup dried fruit (such as raisins) (2 handfuls)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meat and Alternatives</td>
<td>2-3 ounces cooked meats (palm of your hand)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least 3 servings</td>
<td>2 hard cooked eggs</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4 tablespoons peanut butter or other nut butter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milk, Yogurt and Cheese</td>
<td>1 cup cooked dried beans (kidney, navy, etc)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least 4 servings</td>
<td>1/2 cup nuts or seeds (pumpkin or sunflower)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5-6 ounces tofu</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 cup milk (medium glass or a mug)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>8 ounces yogurt (single serving sized carton)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1-2 ounces cheese (2-3 slices)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1/2 cup cottage cheese (small bowl)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Breastfeeding

While breastfeeding provides excellent nutrition to the baby, HIV has been found in breast-milk. Since HIV can be passed from you to your baby through breast milk, it is recommended that HIV-positive women use alternatives to breastfeeding.

Feed your baby the brand of formula suggested by your health care provider. Other alternatives, such as banked breast milk, which is screened for HIV, may be available in your area.
Special Nutritional Considerations:

**Menstruation and PMS**

HIV-positive women may experience changes in their menstrual cycle, including irregularity (not getting a period every month), heavier or lighter periods, or an increase in premenstrual symptoms (PMS), such as breast tenderness, irritability, depression, cramps, and cravings.

Safe guidelines for minimizing these problems include eating a high starch, high fiber, low sugar and low fat diet during the premenstrual and menstrual phases. Many women find some relief by taking a multivitamin/mineral supplement. Cutting back on caffeine may help with breast tenderness. Limiting salty foods (pickles, canned meats and vegetables, most soups, etc.) and snack foods such (potato chips, pretzels and salted crackers) may help decrease bloating. Continue with your regular exercise program, and get enough rest.

**Menopause**

As with all women going through menopause, you may go through changes such as hot flushes and vaginal dryness. Nutritionally, it is suggested that you increase the number of calcium containing foods in your diet to 4 to 5 a day. These foods include milk, cheese, yogurt, calcium-fortified soy products (soymilk, tofu), calcium-fortified orange juice, green leafy vegetables (collard greens, turnip greens, and mustard greens), and sardines. If you cannot drink milk or eat dairy products, ask your health care provider about a calcium supplement. Exercising is important to maintain calcium in bones, as well as general strength, flexibility, energy and sense of well being.
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Special Nutritional Considerations

Weight Issues

If you are overweight and wish to reduce or maintain a lower weight, you should do it working with your health care provider, Registered Dietitian or other Nutritional Professional. It is recommended that you lose fat, but try to gain muscle (lean body mass). Building muscle will help with weight loss. It will help you to keep your immune function and avoid illness.

Unplanned weight loss can be serious and needs to be controlled quickly. Tell your primary care provider and Dietitian about any weight loss, especially unplanned and rapid weight loss. Should appetite be the issue, eating small, frequent meals may help. There are also medicines that can help increase your appetite, including Megace (liquid form) and Marinol (pill form) that is normally taken once or twice a day. It is often recommended to take Marinol at night, as you can sleep through the effects but enjoy a bigger appetite the next day. Request the information from Health Assurance (Section 3) on the Healthy Weight Gain Program to learn how to lose fat and gain muscle.

If you are losing muscle, there are several things you can do. Be sure to mention any body changes to your primary care provider. Resistance exercise is needed to maintain muscle. See Section 3 for tips on exercise. Testosterone is one medicine that is used when men lose muscle. There has been some proof (although still in the experimental stage) that this medicine in much lower doses may help women as well. Women require a special preparation testosterone in a much smaller dosage worn as a patch right on the skin. Some synthetic forms of anabolic steroids may be used with caution. Women can experience side effects with these medicines, though less frequently with oxandrolone. Women should not use oxymetholone. Anabolic steroids can cause "masculinization" of the female fetus, among other problems and should not be used during pregnancy. Growth hormone is also a possible choice. If you are taking any these medications to obtain their full benefit, it is very important to make sure you eat enough daily and do resistance exercise 20 minutes a day 3 times a week.
If you notice body changes such as your stomach and/or breasts getting bigger, while your arms and/or legs may be getting smaller, be sure to mention this to your health care provider. This is becoming more common in people using many of the medicines to control HIV. Your provider may also identify that some of your lab tests are showing abnormal results, especially for cholesterol and triglycerides. It is being termed "lipodystrophy syndrome" or lipoatrophy, or the unusual distribution of fat. While these changes may not be directly related to your diet or exercise routine, it is important that you continue to exercise and eat well to maintain muscle. A good diet and routine exercise may also prove to be helpful in this new condition. Ask for the exercise information in Section 3.
Yeast Infections

Many HIV-positive women commonly get yeast infections or *Candida albicans*. It can be found on the skin and in the mouth, digestive tract, and vagina. When the immune system is not working well, as with HIV-infection, this type of yeast can grow out of control. You may have vaginal itching and discomfort, or painful chewing and swallowing. Be sure to mention any of these symptoms to your health care provider. There are medicines that can help decrease your symptoms. Section 4 can provide eating tips until you feel better.

The role of diet in the development of yeast infections is questionable. Many find avoiding simple sugars helps, including the sugar in the fluids you drink. You may want to limit the amount of fruit juice, fruit punch, soda, Kool-aid, etc., and drink safe water instead. Taking "swish and swallow" medications following a sugary drink or food can also help. A daily serving or two of yogurt with live cultures, especially *Lactobacillus acidophilus*, may help fight the growth of *Candida albicans*. You can buy the *Lactobacillus acidophilus* by itself, but this product requires refrigeration.

Talk to your Registered Dietitian/Nutritionist about any diet changes you make to fight yeast, especially if any food groups need to be avoided from time to time. She or he can suggest other foods to try so that your eating plan still includes all the nutrition you need while fitting your lifestyle.
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Resources for Women

There are many groups around the country and the world specifically designed to help HIV-positive women meet their needs. Ask your case manager or health care provider for information about support services in your area.

Project Inform, in San Francisco, has a wide variety of support information available, and can be obtained by contacting their hotline at 1-800-822-7422.

Women Alive, in Los Angeles, (323-965-1564 or 1-800-554-4876) offers support services for women, a quarterly newsletter, and is active in policy and treatment issues affecting women living with HIV.

Other national resource networks include:

The Babes Network: A Sisterhood of Women Facing HIV Together
1001 Broadway, Suite 105
Seattle, WA 98122
206-720-5566 or 1-800-292-1912
http://www.babesnetwork.org

Center for Women Policy Studies (CWPS)
National Resources Center on Women and AIDS
2000 P St., NW
Suite 508
Washington, DC 20036
202-872-1770

Chicago Women’s AIDS Project
5249 N. Kenmore
Chicago, IL 60640
773-271-2070

Guide to HIV Services and Material for Women
A directory published about every two years.
CDC National AIDS Clearinghouse
1-800-458-5231 to obtain a copy

HEROES (Helping Each Other Reach Out and Educate Society)
PO Box 41283
Des Moines, IA 50311
515-280-6422

HIV Law Project
841 Broadway, Suite 608
New York, NY 10003

Iris House
2271 2nd Ave.
New York, NY 10035
212-423-9049
www.irishouse.org

Life Force Women Against AIDS
165 Cadman Plaza E., Suite 310
Brooklyn, NY 11201
718-797-0937

National Association of People with AIDS
1413 K St., NW
7th Floor
Washington, DC 20005
202-898-0414
http://www.napwa.org

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