

Supporting Young People with ME/CFS

# Diet

## ME/CFS Patient Information

In this leaflet we will give you some useful information and tips on how to improve your diet.

A healthy, balanced diet will help you to give yourself the best chance of recovery.

We normally suggest that young people with ME/CFS make sure they enjoy a healthy, balanced diet.

Whilst this can sometimes be tricky, it means that you should try to eat a variety of foods:

**Carbohydrates** e.g. bread, pasta, cereals, rice, potatoes

**Protein** e.g. meat, fish, milk, cheese, eggs, beans

**Fruit**

**Vegetables**



### How often should I eat?

Many young people find that five or six small meals are better than three big meals. This is especially helpful if you feel nauseated with food. It can also help with activity levels as the body then gets a constant supply of nutrients and sugar rather than bursts, which make activity harder to regulate.

It seems to help if you can have meals at a regular time as your body gets more used to food.

### Are there foods I should eat more of?

There is some evidence that **low iron stores** are associated with fatigue. It seems sensible to make sure that you eat a diet which has iron in it.

#### Iron can be found in:

- All meats
- Oily fish and shellfish
- Egg yolk
- Dried fruits
- Fortified breakfast cereals

Iron absorption is increased by **Vitamin C**.

Vitamin C can be found in:

- Fruits, especially citrus fruits, berries, tomatoes, kiwis
- Dark green vegetables
- Potatoes



We recommend that you try to include these in your diet.

We would not recommend that you take them as supplements without discussing this with your doctor or dietician.

### Are there foods that I should exclude from my diet?

There is no evidence that excluding a food will make everybody with ME/CFS better. Some young people find that excluding certain foods helps. If you want to try excluding foods, we suggest that you do this with your doctor or a dietician as there are risks of causing more harm than benefit.

### What about sugary food?

Some young people find it helpful to try to avoid too much sugary food during the day. This is because sugar can give you a burst of energy, which is followed by a low. This can make managing ME/CFS symptoms more difficult.



If you need to put on weight we may suggest that you have a sugary treat or snack at night as the energy slump will not affect you when you sleep.

### What about drinks?

Some young people find it helps their nausea if they drink frequent small amounts rather than occasional large volumes, especially at meal times. Many grown-ups and young people find both alcohol and caffeine make their ME/CFS worse.

**Caffeine** is often found in soft cola drinks and is also in hot chocolate (and in chocolate). You should avoid caffeine in the late afternoon and evening as this may make sleeping more difficult.

### Why has my weight changed since I've had ME/CFS?

Some young people with ME/CFS find that they put on weight and we think this is probably due to changes in exercise habits. Others find that they lose weight, which may be because they frequently feel sick.

It is important to keep an eye on this as large changes in weight either way may make recovery more difficult.

Please seek advice from a dietician if needed.



### How to contact us:

If you have any questions, you can contact us on **01225 821340** Monday to Friday 8.30am to 4pm. Queries can be emailed to us at [ruh-tr.paedscfsme@nhs.net](mailto:ruh-tr.paedscfsme@nhs.net)

Our administrative team will do their best to help answer your query or will pass on a message to your therapist.

Further information is available at: [www.ruh.nhs.uk/cfs](http://www.ruh.nhs.uk/cfs)

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Please contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) if you require this leaflet in a different format, or would like to feedback your experience of the hospital. Email [ruh-tr.pals@nhs.net](mailto:ruh-tr.pals@nhs.net) or telephone 01225 825656 / 826319.