



Food Safety and Nutrition

Topics

Adherence

Why Is a Good Diet Important for People with HIV?

Good nutrition is important to all people—whether or not they are living with HIV. But some conditions related to treating HIV or AIDS (including wasting, diarrhea, and lipid abnormalities) mean that proper nutrition is really important to people with HIV. Eating well is key to maintaining strength, energy, and a healthy immune system. In addition, because HIV can lead to immune suppression, food safety and proper hygiene are concerns when it comes to preventing infections.

For more information, see the Department of Veterans Affairs' [HIV/AIDS: Diet and Nutrition](#)

A healthy diet is essential to maintaining good health across your lifespan. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) defines a healthy diet as one that: provides enough of each essential nutrient; contains a variety of foods from all of the basic food groups; provides adequate energy to maintain a healthy weight; and does not contain excess fat, sugar, salt, or alcohol. There are six essential nutrients:

- *Protein* builds muscles and a strong immune system.
- *Carbohydrates* (including starches and sugars) give you energy.
- *Fat* gives you extra energy.
- *Vitamins* regulate body processes.
- *Minerals* regulate body processes and also make up body tissues.
- *Water* gives cells shape and acts as a medium in which body processes can occur.

For more information about healthy eating, see FDA's [Smart Nutrition 101: FAQs](#).

Before you make major changes in your diet, however, contact your primary care provider, or a registered dietician who specializes in HIV care, to get a better assessment of your nutritional needs.

What Do I Need to Know About Food Safety?

Because HIV affects your immune system, you may be at greater risk for food-borne illness. So in addition to eating well, you need to eat safely. By following a few basic safety rules when you prepare and eat your meals, you can protect yourself from food-related illness:

- Avoid eating raw eggs, meats, or seafood (including sushi and oysters/shellfish).
- Wash fruits and vegetables thoroughly.
- Use a separate cutting board for raw meats.
- Wash hands, utensils, and cutting boards with soap and water after each use.
- Water safety is extremely important, as water can carry a variety of parasites, bacteria, and viruses. To protect yourself against these infections, here are some helpful hints:
 - Do not drink water from lakes, ponds, rivers, or streams.
 - You may choose to use a store-bought water filter at home for your drinking water.
 - You can significantly reduce your risk of water-borne illness by using only boiled water for drinking and cooking.
 - When traveling abroad in areas where sanitation is poor or water safety is questionable, drink only bottled water and avoid ice or unpasteurized juices and drinks.

Content Source: HIV.gov

Date last updated: May 15, 2017

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- CDC – [HIV Treatment Works: Healthy Diet](https://www.cdc.gov/actagainstaids/campaigns/hivtreatmentworks/livewell/healthydiet.html)
(<https://www.cdc.gov/actagainstaids/campaigns/hivtreatmentworks/livewell/healthydiet.html>)
- FDA – [Food Safety for People at Risk of Foodborne Illnesses](https://www.fda.gov/Food/FoodborneIllnessContaminants/PeopleAtRisk/ucm312565.htm)
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