Role of the Dietitian in Cystic Fibrosis

The dietitian is a key part of the cystic fibrosis (CF) team, working alongside doctors, clinical nurse specialists, physiotherapists and clinical psychologists.

The dietitian’s aim is to guide, support and encourage patients and families with the knowledge on how to manage their nutrition needs. Dietitians offer hints and tips on mealtime management, as well as appropriate suggestions for meal and snack options. We advise on the reason for and the use of enzymes, fat soluble vitamins, and nutritional supplements.

We aim to monitor and interpret growth and identify when changes to nutritional treatment plans are necessary. We offer support and advice on other conditions associated with CF such as CF related diabetes, CF related liver disease and bone disease.

If you have a nutrition related question ask your dietitian!

Staying healthy in CF is most often linked with following a high calorie diet. The aim of nutritional management in CF is to achieve normal growth, normal development and maintain the best nutritional status. It is important to follow the food pyramid with particular focus on the dairy section, the protein section and remembering not to avoid any of the main food groups.

CF related poor nutrition can be as a result of

- Poor absorption of some nutrients, for example fat
  - Approximately 90% of people with CF do not have the required pancreatic enzymes to break down all their food; instead they need to take special enzyme capsules/granules with food. Your dietitian can help you manage this.
- Increased energy needs
  - Patients with CF have a higher number of chest infections and during these time periods the body needs extra energy to heal. Sometimes having an infection can reduce appetite and it can be difficult to
increase the amount of food eaten. This can lead to weight loss; your dietitian can help with lots of tips and tricks to prevent this.

If poor growth or weight loss is noted over time, your dietitian might suggest different options to add extra calories to food. They might recommend food enrichment, the use of oral nutritional supplements or in some cases tube feeding. A wide range of oral nutritional supplements are available as individual drinks, puddings, shots or powders. These can be taken on their own or added to meals, snacks and drinks. These nutritional supplements should not replace regular meals.

**In some cases, with the recent introduction of new drugs and therapies, patients with CF can be recorded as overweight and obese. For overall health it is best to maintain a healthy weight. Your dietitian can give you advice to achieve this.**

Today the likelihood that young people with CF will be shorter and thinner than their peers is no longer okay. The early focus and regular monitoring of nutrition can promote normal growth and development while helping people with CF achieve their full potential.

Created by the Cystic Fibrosis Interest Group, March 2017, Review March 2020

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