

Managing HIV and nutrition

New brochure aims to help PWAs deal with nutrition issues

by Zoran Stjepanovic

Proper nutrition is of vital importance for HIV-positive individuals, yet eating food can be a challenge when you're taking antiretrovirals. Some common short-term side effects of HIV medications include nausea, diarrhea, and lack of appetite. In light of this, BCPWA's Treatment Information Program (TIP) has focused its efforts in the past year on providing education around nutrition and HIV.

First, there was a community forum in Surrey, and then in the autumn of 2006, a series of workshops facilitated by Diana Johansen from Oaktree Clinic. Most recently, TIP created a new, user-friendly brochure entitled "Management Guide for HIV and Nutrition." The brochure focuses on how to manage some of the side effects relating to nutrition. Here are some highlights from the brochure:

Diarrhea

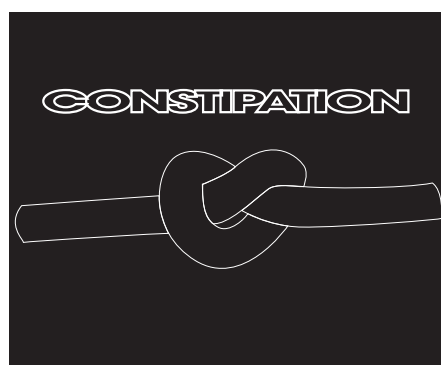


Diarrhea is an all-too-common side effect of antiretrovirals. A number of different medications can result in diarrhea, so it's difficult to point to just one medication. There are ways, however, to manage this unpleasant side effect:

- Eat a "BRAT" diet: bananas, rice, applesauce, and toast
- Avoid caffeine, spicy food, and beans
- Drink lots of fluid, including electrolyte replacements to prevent dehydration

- Take calcium supplements
- Take L-glutamine supplements; however don't take glutamine two to three days prior to blood work, as it can skew your blood lab tests.

Constipation



HIV-positive individuals experience constipation less frequently, however it can still pose problems. Constipation occurs when stools are difficult to pass, or when your stools are quite dry. There are a number of possible causes for this problem, including diets low in fibre, inadequate fluid intake, and some medications. While it does not appear to be a side effect of HIV medications; it can be a side effect from some other medications that PWAs may take, including antacids, antidepressants, and methadone. Lack of exercise and stress can also contribute to constipation.

If you're constipated, try these tips:

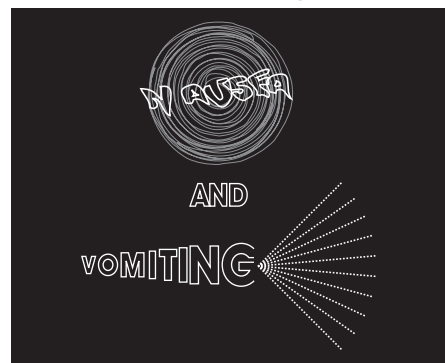
- Eat more fibre, such as raw vegetables and fruit, dried fruit, whole-grain cereals, nuts, seeds, and whole grain bread. A good tip is to gradually increase your fibre intake over several weeks, since gas and bloating may occur if you introduce high-fibre foods into your diet too quickly.
- Eat frequent and small meals.
- Drink plenty of fluids, including water, soups, juices, and milk.

- Be active and exercise to stimulate bowel movement.

• Try to avoid sugar and sweet foods. Some people will try to use a stool softener or very mild laxative, such as milk of magnesia.

If your constipation persists even after trying out some of these remedies above, consult your physician.

Nausea and vomiting



Some suggestions for treating nausea and vomiting:

- Eat dry and salty foods.
- Avoid very sweet foods.
- Nibble on raw ginger or drink ginger tea.
- Eat cold food.
- Choose low-fat foods instead of greasy foods.
- Use medicinal marijuana.

The brochure contains much more information on how to manage some other side effects, such as lack of appetite, and mouth ulcers (thrush). To have a copy mailed to you, contact the TIP office at 604.893.2239. ☎



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