

## INFORMATION FOR PATIENTS

---

# Nutrition after critical illness

---

This information leaflet provides an overview on how to support your nutritional needs after critical illness.

Critical illness can lead to the body using up stores of fat and muscle and you may lose weight during this time. Recovery following critical illness is different for everyone and it can take several months.

You may feel tired and weak and find that everyday tasks are more difficult than before your illness. This is called Intensive Care Unit (ITU) acquired weakness. Nutrition is essential to help your body in its recovery and should form part of your rehabilitation. Eating well can help with symptoms of fatigue, rebuild lost muscle, prevent further unintentional weight loss, and maintain a strong immune system.

You may find it challenging to eat following critical illness because your appetite may be affected, and you may feel full quickly. You may have new swallowing difficulties and be advised to follow a texture modified diet recommended by the speech and language therapist. You may also experience symptoms such as a dry mouth, nausea, taste changes, altered bowel habits and fatigue, which should resolve in time.

Whilst you are still an inpatient, you can help support your nutritional intake by choosing the higher energy and protein options on the menu, which are highlighted by an **E** symbol.

You could have snacks in between each of your meals to top up your intake. These are available at any time; please ask for them. Milk is also available on the drinks trolley and will provide calories and protein as well as hydration.

Once you are discharged from the hospital, it is important to maintain your nutrition. Below are some tips on how to help combat a poor appetite and the feeling of fullness and meet your nutritional needs:

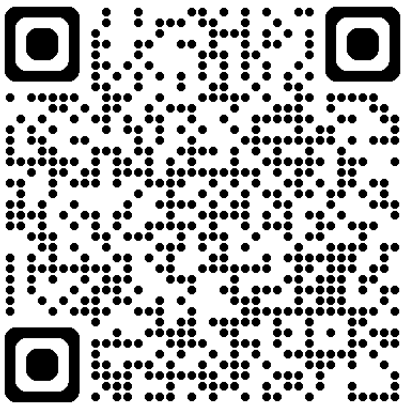
- If you find big meals overwhelming, aim for three smaller meals and three snacks a day.
- Choose full fat versions of foods rather than diet versions.
- Include a protein source at every meal such as beans, pulses, fish, eggs, meat, or meat alternatives.
- Choose drinks that will nourish as well as hydrate you such as milky tea, coffee, malted drinks or milkshakes. If you do not like or cannot tolerate cow's milk, then try soya or pea milk as these contain more protein than other alternative milks. You could also drink fruit juice.
- Try to avoid drinking with, or just before, your meal because this could fill you up. Instead drink between meals.
- Try and get some fresh air daily as this can be a good appetite stimulant.

- Fortify your food by adding high calorie/protein foods into your meals or drinks to increase the nutrition that you get without increasing the portion size. For example, add grated cheese onto pasta or potatoes, cream into porridge or soups, apply butter or spreads liberally, or add four tablespoons of dried milk powder into one pint of full fat milk and use this throughout the day in your drinks or on your cereals.
- If you feel nauseous some people find that peppermint oil or ginger tea can have a soothing effect.

For more detailed information about critical illness and how nutrition can play an important role in your recovery, please scan the QR codes or access the links below.

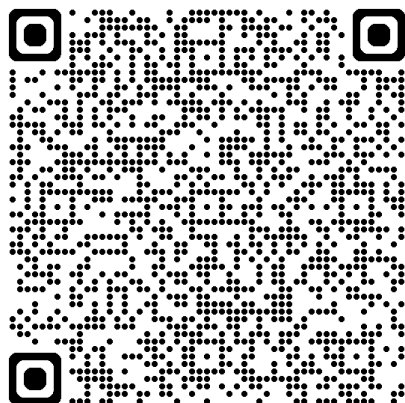
### ICUsteps

<https://icusteps.org/information/information-sheets>



### British Dietetic Association

<https://www.bda.uk.com/resource/tips-to-help-with-eating-problems-after-critical-illness.html>



### Contact details

Department of Nutrition and Dietetics  
King's Mill Hospital  
Trust Administration Building  
Level 2  
Mansfield Road  
Sutton in Ashfield  
Nottinghamshire  
NG17 4JL

### Further sources of information

NHS Choices: [www.nhs.uk/conditions](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions)  
Our website: [www.sfh-tr.nhs.uk](http://www.sfh-tr.nhs.uk)

### Patient Experience Team (PET)

PET is available to help with any of your compliments, concerns or complaints, and will ensure a prompt and efficient service.

**King's Mill Hospital:** 01623 672222

**Newark Hospital:** 01636 685692

**Email:** [sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net](mailto:sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net)

If you would like this information in an alternative format, for example large print or easy read, or if you need help with communicating with us, for example because you use British Sign Language, please let us know. You can call the Patient Experience Team on 01623 672222 or email [sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net](mailto:sfh-tr.PET@nhs.net).

This document is intended for information purposes only and should not replace advice that your relevant health professional would give you.

External websites may be referred to in specific cases. Any external websites are provided for your information and convenience. We cannot accept responsibility for the information found on them.

If you require a full list of references for this leaflet (if relevant) please email [sfh-tr.patientinformation@nhs.net](mailto:sfh-tr.patientinformation@nhs.net) or telephone 01623 622515, extension 6927.

To be completed by the Communications office  
Leaflet code: PIL202407-01-NCI  
Created: July 2024 Review Date: July 2026