

Nutrition and alcohol

Information for patients



People who drink very heavily are often malnourished

There are a number of reasons this can happen:

- **They are getting their energy from alcohol rather than food, and so are simply not eating enough.**
- **Alcoholic drinks can make them feel full up and reduce their appetite, making them feel less like eating and more likely to skip meals.**
- **Vomiting is stopping them from holding onto food long enough to get the nutrients from it.**
- **The alcohol is preventing their body absorbing nutrients and preventing their liver from storing them.**
- **Their stomach is inflamed by gastritis, again making it hard to absorb nutrients.**

Quite often, when heavy drinkers stop drinking, their appetite returns, and they are much more amenable to eating a healthy diet than when they were still actively drinking.

A good diet can improve mood, memory, sleep patterns and energy levels. Vitamins such as vitamin B1 (Thiamine) are also important for a healthy brain. A balanced diet will include lots of fruit and vegetables, starchy foods (carbohydrates), moderate amounts of protein, milk and dairy foods and only small amounts of fats, salt and sugar. **The 'eat well plate' opposite shows the balance of foods that makes up a healthy diet.**

You do not need to achieve this balance with every meal but try to get the balance right over a day or even a week. Try to choose a variety of different foods from each of the groups to help you get the wide range of nutrients your body needs to stay healthy.

Drink plenty of fluids to keep hydrated; six to eight glasses a day is recommended (water, juice, tea, coffee, milk, etc.).



Meal ideas

The following table may provide some meal ideas for your breakfast, lunch, dinner and snacks.

Breakfast	Lunch	Dinner	Snacks
Breakfast cereal with milk	Sandwich (tuna & sweetcorn or ham & cheese)	Jacket potato with beans and cheese	Yoghurt and fruit
Two slices of toast with a banana	Creamy soup and roll or sandwich	Chicken curry	Smoothie or milkshake
Porridge oats with milk and fruit	Chicken wrap	Pasta bake with cheese	Hot chocolate or milky coffee with biscuits
Eggs on toast	Fish finger sandwich	Eggs fried rice with vegetables	Cheese and crackers
Mushrooms and tomatoes on toast	Pasta salad	Chicken / fish with potatoes and vegetables	Hot pudding (apple crumble and custard or rice pudding)
Omelette with cheese	Beans on toast with cheese	Cottage pie and vegetables	Crumpets or toast with butter and jam
Yoghurt and fruit	Chicken / ham salad	Microwave meal with vegetables	Nuts

Advice for eating well if you have a reduced appetite:

- Eat little and often – ‘grazing’ or having a small snack frequently (for example, every two hours) may be easier than trying to eat a big meal in one go.
- Remember eating something is always better than eating nothing (even if it’s not the healthiest option).
- If the idea of cooking a meal is off-putting, think of making a nutritious snack instead. For example, an omelette or a slice of toast with something on it.
- Have quick and tasty snacks prepared and ready to go so you can grab them during the day.
- Try making smoothies or milkshakes using full fat (blue labelled) milk – you may find having a nutritious drink easier to manage than a meal.
- If you find your appetite is better at certain times of the day, try to eat a bit extra at these times.
- Try adding ingredients that are energy dense to your meals to increase the overall calorie content without increasing the portion size. For example, sprinkling some grated cheese on your evening meal or using olive oil or butter in your meals.
- Try to eat milky puddings such as custards and rice puddings and energy dense snacks such as toast, crumpets or a scone with butter and jam.
- Go on a weekly shop, or order online, and stock up your cupboards with your favourite foods. You will be more likely to use them if they are readily available.

Thiamine

Alcohol can affect our body’s ability to digest, absorb and store important vitamins and nutrients from our food. Thiamine, also known as vitamin B1, helps our body turn our food into fuel for energy. It keeps our brain healthy, and our nerve endings working well. Having low levels of vitamin B1 (thiamine) in your body can cause damage to your brain and nervous system, and even cause permanent brain damage.

In hospital, you may have received a yellow drip containing a liquid called Pabrinex, which contains highly concentrated B vitamins, such as thiamine. When you are back at home, you should take the tablet version of thiamine. You may have been given a prescription for this, but if you haven’t, your GP may be able to give you one. The recommended dose of thiamine is 200 milligrams (mg) to 300mg a day. This will be prescribed as two or three smaller doses during the day. You should keep taking thiamine if you continue to drink at a high risk or dependent level. You should review the ongoing need for this with your GP.

Our bodies do not naturally produce Thiamine, so it is also important that we eat a thiamine rich diet. Thiamine rich foods include:

- **Pork including gammon, bacon and ham.**
- **Bovril and marmite.**
- **Fortified cereals.**
- **Fortified bread.**
- **Brown rice.**
- **Nuts and seeds.**
- **Eggs.**
- **Baked beans.**
- **Fresh, dried and tinned fruits (particularly bananas and oranges).**
- **Liver.**

Contact details

This leaflet has been given to you by the Drug and Alcohol Liaison Team. We can be contacted on **01623 622515, extension 3935**. We can offer brief telephone advice, but we do not offer one to one/ongoing support outside of hospital.

The community alcohol service for Nottinghamshire – Change Grow Live (CGL) – can offer ongoing support and advice. They can be contacted on **01158 960 798**, or if you live in Derbyshire, the Derbyshire Recovery Partnership can be contacted on **0845 308 4010**.

You can also get support from your GP, who will give you advice and support about your drinking as well as your general health.

Further sources of information

NHS Choices: www.nhs.uk/conditions

Our website: 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

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.

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 (if relevant) for this leaflet, please email sfh-tr.patientinformation@nhs.net or telephone 01623 622515, extension 6927.

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