

TALK ABOUT nutrition & HIV

Nutrition and antiretrovirals are both important.

Good nutrition is very important if you are living with HIV. Antiretrovirals are the medicines that treat HIV. Most people with HIV only need to start taking them after a number of years, when they develop AIDS. Antiretrovirals help most people who take them live much longer, healthier lives. They have to be taken everyday for life. Nutrition is not a replacement for antiretroviral treatment. But good nutrition can help you stay healthy for longer so that you can start taking antiretrovirals later. Once you start taking antiretrovirals, good nutrition will improve their benefits.



Eat a balanced diet.

Foods fall into the following three groups:



Body-building foods (protein): beans, soya, peanuts, eggs, meat, fish, chicken.

Energy-giving foods (carbohydrates and fats): maize, millet, rice, potatoes, sugar and oil.

Foods with vitamins that protect against infections: fruit and vegetables.

Try to eat food from each of these groups every day. This ensures a balanced diet. Also try to eat at least three times a day.

Since your body has to fight HIV as well as other infections, it needs more energy. Foods that many people eat everyday like pap, bread, rice, potatoes and mngqusho contain lots of energy.

Eat lots of energy foods to prevent losing too much weight due to HIV.

Make eating an enjoyable event.

Many people living with HIV are badly informed about nutrition. We have been told, "do not eat this or don't eat too much of that". To wonder the whole time whether we are eating the right thing is not good. It makes us feel insecure and guilty. Eating should be an enjoyable, relaxed event.



What matters most is that you eat enough.

People with HIV often lose their appetites when they are sick. However, fighting HIV increases the energy needs of our bodies. Make sure you eat enough when you are ill even if you have lost your appetite.

If you cannot afford to buy enough food to eat, find out if you can apply for a social grant. Join the campaign for the Basic Income Grant so that everyone can have enough money to eat.



HIV causes poor nutrition. Poor nutrition makes HIV worse. A vicious circle.

HIV reduces absorption of food, which weakens the body's ability to resist all kinds of diseases. Poorly nourished people are much more likely to get severe diarrhoea, TB and other infections.



Vitamins

Public clinics give people with HIV vitamins pills. These are often useful for people with HIV. But they are NOT a substitute for antiretrovirals. You should eat lots of fruit and vegetables to ensure you get enough vitamins.



Reduce alcohol and smoking.

Large amounts of alcohol makes HIV worse. Alcohol can also interact very badly with antiretrovirals. Drink small amounts of alcohol or do not drink it at all.

Smoking causes many illnesses, especially chest infections. People often smoke instead of snacking. This is unhealthy if you have HIV. Try to give up smoking.

