



**NUTRITION &  
MENTAL HEALTH**  
**Information for Patients and Families**  
**Covenant Health**  
**Mental Health Program**  
**Grey Nuns Community Hospital & Misericordia Community Hospital**

**How Can Mental Health Concerns Affect My Nutrition?**

Increased or decreased appetite is very common in people with mental illnesses. This can also be related to medications.

**What Can I Do To Improve My Nutrition?**

Some general tips to follow include:

- ◆ Follow the Canada Food Guide
- ◆ Include a variety of foods
- ◆ Eat three meals a day
- ◆ Include healthy snacks between meals
- ◆ Include foods that are high in fibre
- ◆ Drink 6 - 8 glasses of water a day
- ◆ Limit salt, alcohol and caffeine intake

**What Can I Do If I Have  
Increased Appetite Or Weight?**

- ◆ Do not skip meals. Skipping meals can cause overeating later in the day.
- ◆ Plan healthy snacks around your day and take time to enjoy them.
- ◆ Choose snacks of vegetables, fresh fruit and low fat dairy
- ◆ Limit pop, juice and other sugar drinks.
- ◆ Eat slowly.
- ◆ Keep in mind that it takes your body about 20 minutes to feel full, therefore, wait 20 minutes before you have a second serving.
- ◆ Do not eat in front of the TV or while reading a book. You are more likely to overeat or eat less healthy food.
- ◆ Get involved in activities or hobbies.
- ◆ Avoid emotional eating. Find ways to deal with boredom, loneliness and other triggers.

**What Can I Do If I Have A Decreased Appetite Or Weight Loss?**

- ◆ Plan three meals and three snacks a day.
- ◆ Take a walk before meals. Fresh air can stimulate appetite.

- ◆ Ensure you eat when you feel good.
- ◆ Have fluids after meals so you don't fill up on liquids.
- ◆ Chew slowly and take breaks from eating as needed.
- ◆ Remember, exercise can help digestion and increase appetite.

## **Constipation**

Some people experience constipation as a result of diet change or medications. The following tips can be helpful:

- ◆ Increase fibre and fluid intake daily
- ◆ Increase the fibre in your diet slowly and gradually. A sudden increase in fibre can cause cramping & gas
- ◆ Increase daily physical exercise.

High Fibre choices include:

- ◆ Whole wheat pastas, beans, lentils and breads.
- ◆ Cereals with more than 4 grams of dietary fibre per serving as listed on the nutritional label. For example try All Bran Buds with vanilla yogurt.
- ◆ Fibre supplements such as Benefibre

The following may be helpful:

- ◆ Eat skins and seeds of fruit and vegetables when possible.
- ◆ Drink at least 6 to 8 glasses of water a day.
- ◆ You do not need to avoid milk or dairy. It is a myth that these foods cause constipation.
- ◆ If necessary, you can consult your physician, who can recommend a laxative or stool softener.

Add inulin fibre supplement such as: Benefibre to liquids. Start with 1 to 2 teaspoons a day and increase according to the directions on the label.

## **What can I do for dry mouth?**

- ◆ Sip on water and use ice chips throughout the day.
- ◆ Brush your teeth to maintain good oral hygiene.
- ◆ Avoid mouthwash containing alcohol.
- ◆ Avoid alcohol, tobacco and caffeinated beverages as they can make you dry mouth feel worse.
- ◆ Consult your physician or pharmacist as there are products available to help with dry mouth.

Physical activity is important for overall health, strong muscles and bones. Balance your intake and activity to achieve a healthy active lifestyle.

## **If you notice a significant weight or appetite change let your doctor know.**

Where can you get more information?

- ask your doctor or nurse
- call Health Link - 780-408-5465

This information was written by the Patient Education Committee in the Mental Health Program, Covenant Health in January, 2009. Permission is given to photocopy as is. Reorder Form # **53721**