



No. 13 – Healthy Eating with

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Title: **HEALTHY EATING – Just lettuce and lentils?**

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Although there is little clinical evidence of any link between lifestyle and ITP, looking after our health is very important, whether or not ITP is a factor. However, there is plenty of good evidence to show the relevance of diet and lifestyle in preventing conditions such as heart disease, high blood pressure, cancer, diabetes and osteoporosis...

The first element of good health is to be a non-smoker who takes regular exercise and who watches the alcoholic drinks. This sets the scene for a healthy lifestyle. The second element is to choose and enjoy a diet which can include a wide variety of foods without necessarily excluding anything, unless a GP or dietitian has clinically diagnosed a food allergy or intolerance.

The best way to ensure a good diet is to choose foods from each of the 5 food groups:

- Plenty of fruit and vegetables – at least 5 a day
- Plenty of bread, rice, potatoes, pasta and other starchy foods – choose wholegrain varieties whenever you can
- Some milk and dairy foods – choose mostly lower fat versions.
- Some lean meat, fish, eggs, beans, nuts and seeds – cook without added fat
- Just a small amount of foods and drinks high in fat and/or sugar.

There are a number of caveats to observe if someone is planning a major dietary change. Diets that are strict, limited or extreme – such as macrobiotic or vegan diets – do not contain dairy or animal products and these foods need to be carefully selected and balanced to ensure an adequate supply of well-absorbed and available nutrients. Children and older people may have difficulty in eating enough of these bulky foods to meet all their requirements, especially for energy, protein, vitamins, calcium and iron.

For example, calcium is best absorbed from dairy foods, so exclusion of these may result in an insufficient intake of calcium unless these are replaced with sufficient alternative sources, like nuts and seeds. This is particularly important in children and young people with growing bones and also important to those who may have had long-term treatment with steroids, where bone density may have been affected.

Frequent blood loss in ITP may increase the requirements for iron in the diet. Although there are good sources of iron in foods like green vegetables, beans and chickpeas, we absorb iron best from so called 'haem iron' found in meat and fish.

Good quality protein (milk, eggs, meat, fish, cheese) contains a full range of amino acids, which are needed for the body to make the antibodies that help us fight everyday infections. Protein from vegetable sources does not provide this full range so it becomes more important to balance protein from cereal foods with pulses and seeds to ensure an adequate supply of the full range of amino acids.

Important things to consider:

- Enjoy meals at your leisure and keep a balanced view. There is no need to feel guilty about eating a small piece of chocolate, but 2 big bars a day is probably not a healthy choice!
- Variety: include as many different kinds of foods as possible each week, certainly more than just lettuce and lentils.
- Portion size – we have become too accustomed to larger ‘super-sized’ meals, so fill up your plate with fruit and vegetables and include smaller portions of other foods.
- Every day we need at least 5 portions of fruit and vegetables, although some research suggests even more – especially for smokers.
- Eat ‘across the rainbow’ to make sure of a good variety of anti-oxidant compounds that are known to benefit our health
- Reducing saturated fat in the diet remains a key message for heart health, so trim the visible fats and use spreads only thinly. Strong cheeses give lots of flavour, so only small quantities are needed.
- Before making changes to a diet or lifestyle you should first check with your doctor. If you need to lose weight and your doctor recommends it, remember that slow and steady wins the day. A weight loss of 1-2 lbs or about 1 kg a week is ideal.

Gluten free diets

The number of people in the population with a demonstrable gluten sensitivity is really quite low. However, when a gluten free diet is followed by those with a proven diagnosed coeliac disease, most of the malabsorption problems will be resolved as the mucosa recovers and gut function returns to normal. Vitamins, minerals and protein will be better absorbed and this should make good any previous nutritional deficiencies that developed before diagnosis and treatment.

To check out your healthy lifestyle, score one point for each ‘Yes’ response to these questions:

Do you:

- Enjoy a variety of different foods from each of the 5 food groups?
- Eat regularly, including breakfast?
- Make sure that fruit and vegetables make up one third of the food you eat (5 or more servings per day) and eat across the rainbow’?
- Choose unrefined or wholegrain starchy foods (e.g. bread, other cereals, pasta, rice and potatoes) to make up about a third of your meals?
- Eat only small amounts of lean red meat, or choose fish, eggs or vegetarian alternatives like beans, peas and lentils?
- Swap high fat dairy foods such as milk and cheese, for lower fat versions like skimmed or semi skimmed milk, reduced fat cheeses?
- Limit foods high in fat and/or sugar like cakes, biscuits, and crisps?
- Take care to avoid adding extra salt or choosing salty foods?
- Drink alcohol only within the limits of 2-3 units a day or less for women and 3-4 units a day or less for men?

HOW DID YOU SCORE?

9-11: a healthy score. 6-8: consider ways to improve. 6 or below: It's time to