

Special Considerations for Those Who Are HIV Positive

Studies of HIV-infected men indicate that they have higher resting metabolic rates, elevated protein breakdown, and protein synthesis than do non-HIV-infected individuals. This condition is referred to as a chronic-inflammation, wasting syndrome. They are also more likely to have elevated cholesterol and triglyceride levels due to the antiviral medication regimen. It has been found that HIV-infected individuals are healthier at a body mass index (BMI) above 25 than HIV-infected persons with lower BMIs, so steps should be taken to ensure adequate calorie and protein intake given these circumstances. HIV-infected individuals should not lose large amounts of weight, unless they are obese and at risk for heart disease and diabetes.

A whole food, plant-based lifestyle including plenty of fruits, vegetables, and juices will help to strengthen the immune system, help to placate the side effects of the anti-viral therapy, help to address elevated cholesterol and triglyceride levels, and help to fight the inflammation. Choosing organic food whenever possible will limit exposure to carcinogenic pesticides and herbicides which can burden the immune system.

Regular exercise, both cardiovascular and resistance, may help to curb side effects experienced from antiretroviral drug therapy and may help the patient deal with symptoms of depression.

Psychotherapeutic treatment and a strong support system to manage stress may improve resistance to opportunistic infections by boosting the immune system.

Traditional Chinese medicine uses mushrooms to resist stress and to improve immune function. Incorporate shiitake, oyster, maitake, and enoki mushrooms into your diet. Reishi mushrooms are too woody and too bitter to be eaten, but may be used in teas and extracts. Host Defense is a product which combines many beneficial mushrooms. Astragalus has been shown to have antiviral and immune boosting capabilities. Echinacea is another commonly known immune booster. Health foods stores now offer many preparations such as Host Defense and products that contain Astragalus and echinacea that may be helpful.

Studies conducted to investigate the benefit of supplementation have preliminarily indicated that certain nutritional support may be beneficial, however, additional studies need to be completed before routine supplemental recommendations can be made. With that in mind, the findings of the initial studies suggest:

- Supplementation with the amino acids L-arginine and L-glutamine and related compounds beta-hydroxy and beta-methylbutrate may assist with increased protein needs.
- 200 mg of supplemental selenium daily may lower the frequency of infection.
- Approximately 60% of HIV-infected individuals have been found to be deficient in magnesium, however, routine supplementation is not recommended unless the patient is prescribed foscarnet, which is known to cause low magnesium levels.

If the immune system successfully battles an infection without the assistance of antibiotics, it rebounds stronger than it was prior to the infection. For this reason, be careful not to use antibiotics indiscriminately. Give the body a chance to fight the invader. Antibiotic use should be reserved for incidences where the body is not successfully fighting off the bacterial infection or when the infection resides in a vital organ. At the same time, do not allow infections to persist as it can place a strain on the immune system. Take notice of unexplained symptoms that may indicate that an infection is present. Sexually transmitted diseases and infections of the teeth and gums may go unnoticed. Be vigilant with oral hygiene, sexual hygiene, and the overall hygiene of orifices. Immunosuppressive drugs such as steroids and corticosteroids should be avoided.

if possible as they suppress the immune system and hamper its ability to function. If the use of these drugs is unavoidable, limit their use to a few weeks at most.

If preparing for surgery, consider having some of your own blood drawn and saved in the event that you would need a blood transfusion. Transfused blood products from another person contain foreign proteins and could contain viruses, both of which would cause a strain on your immune system.

If undergoing radiation therapy, insist that a lead shield be placed over your thymus gland, which is located behind the breastbone. It is not uncommon for allopathic doctors to hold the misguided belief that the thymus gland is not operational in adulthood, however, it is an integral part of your immune system and should be protected.

From time to time, alternative methods surface that suggest they are effective against HIV and HIV-related symptoms. Here is a summary of the research found on certain approaches:

- There are some claims to the miracle of coconut oil for inactivating the HIV virus. The basis of these claims appears to rely more on personal testimonials than on sound, scientific research. 92% of coconut oil is saturated fat which means that it will place you at risk for heart disease, weight gain, and all of the other health risks associated with saturated fats. Use it sparingly as a flavor enhancer and incorporate it into your diet as you would a condiment.
- A special edition of the Journal of the American Medical Association (November 11, 1998) investigated the claim that acupuncture was successful in treating nerve pain related to infection with the HIV virus. Unfortunately, the results of the study into the claim were unable to prove that this method was effective. As of the date of this research, no treatment has yet been found.

As a Plant-Based Nutrition Counselor, I provide clients with a summary of research from doctors in the forefront of nutrition research. It is not intended to replace competent medical advice. Notify your physician when making any significant lifestyle change such as the transition to a plant-based lifestyle as the subsequent improvement in your health may decrease your need for certain medications. It is imperative that you do not alter your medication regimen or stop it entirely without the advice of your physician.

*I am a Plant-Based Nutrition Counselor, a graduate of **the only collegiate program in the country** focused on the medical benefits of a plant-based lifestyle from Cornell University, and am board certified by the American Association of Drugless Practitioners. I help people to achieve their wellness goals by providing them with the tools that they need to gain control over their health. If you would prefer individualized assistance with your weight, with a chronic, degenerative disease, with other health and wellness aspirations, or if you would like me to speak to a group, please give me a call at 724.469.0693 or email me at traceyeakin@gmail.com to arrange a time.*

I can personally attest to this lifestyle. The results are nothing short of dramatic. I had been a vegetarian for 20 years when 3 years ago I adopted an entirely plant-based lifestyle. Since that time, I have lost over 50 pounds and have kept it off and resolved an autoimmune condition known as idiopathic thrombocytopenic purpura or ITP. My body was attacking and destroying my platelets. I could have faced the removal of my spleen or platelet transfusions. A low-fat, plant-based lifestyle changed everything for me. My goal is to help as many people as possible to make similar positive changes in their lives.

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