

Nutrition Information

Good nutrition is important in managing and overcoming any disease, especially inflammatory bowel disease (IBD). There can be many causes of inadequate nutrition in children and adolescents with IBD. First, a child's appetite may decrease during a "flare", resulting in inadequate calories to sustain normal activity and growth. Second, during times of inflammation, the digestive tract may not absorb nutrients as well as it should, or the body may not use the nutrients appropriately. Third, the body may need more calories to repair itself during and after a "flare." Finally, some medications may affect appetite and nutrition.

DIET MODIFICATIONS

Some parents worry that something in their child's diet caused him or her to have IBD, but there is no evidence to suggest that this is so. There is also no evidence that any particular diet will "fix" IBD. Therefore, there are usually no major restrictions on a child's diet. However, individuality is the key. Many children do not have any obvious sensitivity to foods, whereas other children may. It is important to keep a food journal if you feel your child is not tolerating certain foods, then speak with your child's health care team about your concerns.

However, a few specific situations may require a change in your child's diet. Dietary fiber may cause pain and block the intestine if it is narrowed by inflammation or after surgery. A low-fiber diet can be helpful when inflammation of the intestines has made the passageway narrow. Such changes in diet are often temporary, until the inflammation is improved.

Salt intake should be monitored while taking corticosteroids, since salt increases fluid retention (swelling), a side effect of steroids.

Some children may have difficulty with milk and other dairy products. However, this is often only a temporary problem. Dairy products should only be restricted from the diet if they cause problems, as they are an excellent source of protein and calcium, and are high in nutritional value.

During a period of inflammation, a high calorie, high protein diet may be beneficial. The meat and dairy food

groups provide good sources of calories and protein. For those having trouble eating, liquid diets can be useful in supplementing the nutrients they miss. These liquids may sometimes need to be given with a special feeding tube if the child cannot consume enough calories to ensure good growth.

Claims of curing or improving inflammatory bowel disease with special diets are sometimes heard or seen. While not medically proven, some of these diets can be safely followed under medical supervision, while others are not safe or appropriate for children. It is always best to discuss any diet change with your child's health care team, especially if a special diet is being considered.

VITAMINS, MINERALS, HERBS, AND MEDICATIONS

It is important to let your child's physician know if you are giving your child any over the counter medicines, multivitamins, minerals or herbal supplements, as they can possibly interact with your child's medications.

It is usually recommended that your child take a multivitamin with iron. If your child's iron level is low, your child's physician may recommend an additional iron supplement. The absorption of iron is better if it is taken with vitamin C, so have your child take the iron with some orange juice or other beverage fortified with Vitamin C. Your child's doctor may also recommend additional folate.

Children with IBD are at risk for osteoporosis (thin, weak bones) especially when they are on corticosteroids for any length of time. Corticosteroids may interfere with the body's ability to absorb calcium. It is important to take in recommended amounts of calcium and vitamin D for strong bones and teeth. Your child's physician or dietician can tell you the amount that your child should take based on your child's weight and age.

Overall, nutrition plays an important role in the treatment of IBD. Proper nutrition may enable your child to reach their full growth potential and help them to live a healthier life.