

# Statewide Persistent Pain Management Network



## Persistent Pain Education Series

### Your Guide to Good Nutrition

Your pain may be influenced by your diet and weight - and by maintaining a **healthy eating regime** you may reduce your persistent pain. If you are overweight and suffer from back, hip, knee or foot pain the excess weight may be contributing. **Managing your weight** is not only beneficial in managing your pain, but will also make you feel better now and in the future.

Please remember that unintentional weight loss (weight loss that occurs despite not trying to lose weight) can be a sign of an underlying illness. Speak to your **general practitioner (GP)** if you feel you have lost weight without trying or without changing your diet and exercise habits. Don't forget, your diet is what you eat every day, not a short-term change in eating habits.

### Managing your diet and weight

Maintaining a healthy diet (by eating nutritious foods) and weight may help to **reduce your persistent pain**. Poor nutrition and an unhealthy weight can increase your **risk of developing disease** (e.g. diabetes or cardiovascular disease) which may increase your pain. Even though you may be eating nutritious foods it is possible to eat too much of a good thing. You may not need to change what you eat, but rather you may need to reduce the **amount** you eat. **Small changes** can make a big difference over time.

### Fruit and vegetables

It is recommended adults eat at least **two serves of fruit** and **five serves of vegetables** each day. They are packed with **essential vitamins, minerals and fibre** all of which assist our bodies to work at optimum efficiency. Eating fruit and vegetables really doesn't have to be as boring as some of us may think, it is possible to create tasty and affordable meals that are actually healthy.

### Fats

Our **body requires fats for carrying vitamins A, D, E, and K. Mono and polyunsaturated fats are best** (e.g. nuts and seeds). Eating large quantities of saturated fats (e.g. greasy cuts of meats) and trans-fats (e.g. fried foods and chips) can lead to an increased risk of coronary and cardiovascular disease.

### Water

Drink plenty of water - the recommended intake is **six to eight cups per day**. However, your intake may depend on many things, including:

- Grain and starch intake
- Activity levels
- Weight
- Weather





If you are consuming coffee, tea, cordial, alcohol, energy or soft drinks throughout the day you may need more than six to eight cups of water (**not all liquids hydrate** - only water serves that function). However, you may need to reduce your water intake with certain diseases or conditions (e.g. heart or kidney failure).

## Energy

Your body needs natural energy to run at optimal efficiency. Weight gain can occur when your intake of energy (from food and drink) exceeds your output of energy (from activities involving exercise). For example, if you eat a chocolate bar you would need to ride a bike at a medium pace for 60 minutes or walk at a medium pace for 90 minutes to use up the energy from the chocolate bar. If you want to lose weight, **eat foods that are lower in energy** and **slowly increase the amount of exercise you do**.

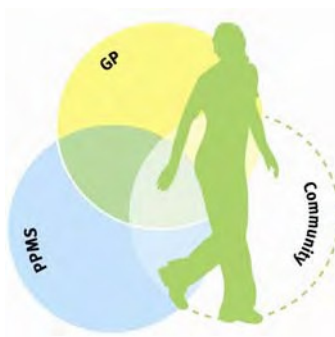
## Omega-3 fatty acids

Research indicates omega-3 (e.g. fish oil) has numerous beneficial effects for some mental health conditions, and can increase brain function (e.g. mood enhancement). There is also research to support the anti-inflammatory qualities of high dosages of omega-3s for people experiencing persistent pain. Speak to your GP or pain medicine specialist about an appropriate dose for you.

## Caffeine, alcohol, tobacco and sugar (CATS) are bad

Refined or artificial CATS can have a **dramatic effect on the way you function** if taken in moderate to high doses. CATS are stimulants and with any stimulant the greater the high the greater the fall. **Common symptoms** associated with stimulant use, include:

- Cravings
- Mood swings or issues (anxiety, depression)
- Irritability
- Restlessness
- Poor memory
- Difficulty concentrating or focusing
- 'Brain fog' (slowed mental processing)
- Hypersensitivity to sound, noise, light
- Disturbed sleep (insomnia, hypersomnia).



Any stimulant has a dramatic effect on your functioning

Remember, some of these symptoms may instead be caused by the medicines you are taking or certain diseases.

## Alcohol

Alcohol can change a person's mood, reduce inhibitions, impair judgement and make some people feel more confident and less anxious. Research suggests mild to moderate use is beneficial to health (more specifically red wine which contains antioxidants). However, knowing where to draw the line is confusing. **Moderate to heavy alcohol intake is harmful** for a person's health and this negatively impacts the body's ability to function at a level of maximum wellness. Even in small amounts, alcohol can have **dangerous interactions with strong pain medication**.

Alcohol is a **carbohydrate** (a relative of sugar) and is a potent source of energy. Increased alcohol intake results in **increased sugar intake** which is linked to various neurological changes (refer to Refined and artificial sugar below).



## Tobacco

A smoking addiction can be tough to quit, making people ignore the negative health risks, including the risk of early death.

**Nicotine is a stimulant and a sedative** and can cause an almost immediate 'kick' due to triggering adrenaline release and other hormones. Nicotine only takes seconds to reach the brain from the lungs and affects the body for around half an hour. Repeated stimulation leads to depression and fatigue (among other symptoms) so the user craves more and more to satisfy the energy 'kick'.

For helpful advice on how to quit contact Quitline on 13 78 48 or talk to your GP.

## Refined and artificial sugar

Refined and artificial sugars **contain no fibre, minerals, proteins, fats or enzymes**. It is important to steer clear of food and drink that are fluorescent in colour as they are not in their natural or whole state.

## What happens when you eat a refined carbohydrate like sugar?

Your body must borrow vital nutrients from healthy cells to metabolise the incomplete food. Calcium, sodium, potassium and magnesium are taken from various parts of the body to make use of the sugar. Taking these nutrients from healthy cells can interfere with your cellular environment in your body, which can lead to numerous symptoms and disease.

## Tips for maintaining a healthy and nutritious diet

- Get **your family and friends** involved so you are all cooking and eating together.
- Eat more **nutritious** foods (e.g. fruits and vegetables).
- **Treat yourself** once in a while.
- **Minimise** all stimulants (CATS).
- **Drink** plenty of water.
- **Ask your GP** how you can improve your nutrition to manage your pain better.



### Notes:

Example: What changes can I make to improve my diet?

## Additional resources

Heart Foundation [www.heartfoundation.org.au](http://www.heartfoundation.org.au)

Swap It, Don't Stop It [www.swapit.gov.au](http://www.swapit.gov.au)

Queensland Health, Health Eating [www.health.qld.gov.au/healthyeating/](http://www.health.qld.gov.au/healthyeating/)

Dietitians Association of Australia [www.daa.asn.au](http://www.daa.asn.au)

Arthritis Queensland [www.arthritis.org.au](http://www.arthritis.org.au)

Cancer Council Queensland [www.cancerqld.org.au](http://www.cancerqld.org.au)

Diabetes Australia (Queensland) [www.diabetesqld.org.au](http://www.diabetesqld.org.au)