Diet following Gut Graft versus Host Disease (GVHD)

Gut graft versus host disease (GVHD) sometimes occurs after an allogeneic or donor stem cell transplant. GVHD can affect any part of your gut. It can cause cramps, stomach pain and diarrhoea. It may mean that you have been on fluids, minimal food or TPN (total parenteral nutrition) for a length of time.

Starting to eat again

Once your GVHD begins to resolve, it is important to start introducing food slowly. Follow a high energy, high protein, and low fibre diet. This diet aims to prevent weight loss, assist in recovery and reduce gut symptoms.

- Start with trying high energy, high protein liquids every 2-3 hours.
- On advice of your medical team, introduce solid foods that are low in fibre slowly every 3-4 hours.
- As gut symptoms improve, slowly introduce foods from your normal diet as able.

Every person is different in what they will tolerate and how quickly they will get back to their usual foods.

Increasing protein & energy

High protein and energy foods will assist in preventing weight loss. Often small frequent meals and snacks are easier to manage than large meals. Make each meal as nutritious as possible. Suggestions include:

- Ensure all meals are high in protein and energy
- Have a nutritious snack between meals
- Have high energy, high protein nourishing fluids

High protein foods include:

- Milk or dairy products e.g. yoghurt, custard, hard cheeses
- Meat, fish & chicken
- Eggs
- Nuts & seeds*
- Beans & legumes* e.g. Lentils, chickpeas, baked beans
- Meat alternatives e.g. Tofu, vegetarian sausages

*Note: you may need to limit these foods initially as they are high in fibre
High energy foods include:

- Full cream milk or dairy products
- Margarine, butter, oil & salad dressings
- Chocolates, sweets, honey, sugar
- Pasta or rice dishes made with creamy or meat sauces
- Frozen ready meals e.g. lasagne

Nutritious snacks

- Ice-cream, yoghurts, custards and other dairy desserts e.g. *Fruche*, crème brulee, mousse, rice pudding, *Le rice*
- Boiled eggs
- Cakes and biscuits
- Homemade or commercial dips made with cream cheese or sour cream
- Hard cheeses
- Smooth peanut butter, avocado, hommus, tahini, cream cheese or *Nutella* on bread, crumpets, pikelets or crackers
- Soups with cream, evaporated milk or meat

Nourishing fluids

Do not fill up on low energy fluids such as tea, coffee, water, broths or diet soft drinks and cordials.

Drink plenty of nourishing fluids throughout the day to boost protein and energy intake. Use full cream milk when possible.

- *Milo*, *Ovaltine* or *Nesquik*
- Fruit smoothies and milkshakes
- Flavoured milks e.g. *Breaka*, *Rush*
- Enriched milk. Add 1 Tb skim milk powder to 250ml full cream milk and use this anywhere you would use regular milk

Commercial supplements

Speak to your Dietitian if you require more information on these:

- Powder-based formula e.g. *Sustagen Hospital Formula* (available with or without fibre) or *Ensure* powder (contains fibre)
- Ready to drink formula e.g. *Fortisip, Ensure Plus, Resource Plus, Resource Fruit, Enlive*
- Protein supplements e.g. *Beneprotein, Promod*
- Carbohydrate supplements e.g. *Polyjoule, Polycose*

*Note*: Supplements containing fibre may need to be limited - see fibre section below.
Reducing dietary fibre

In the weeks following GVHD, a low fibre diet is recommended until your gut fully recovers. You do not need to avoid all fibre-rich foods. It is acceptable to choose some fibre containing foods in smaller amounts than you would usually eat. It is important to:

- Have small, frequent meals
- Limit high fibre foods

Reduce your fibre intake by:

- Limiting foods such as whole-grain breads and high fibre breakfast cereals e.g. All Bran, Fibre plus and muesli
- Choose refined cereal products, such as white rice, bread and pasta
- Choose lower fibre fruits such as melons or peeled fruits instead of unpeeled fruits. Limit dried fruit.
- Avoid large amounts of green leafy vegetables, raw vegetables, legumes (e.g. beans, chickpeas), nuts & seeds

Other things to consider

Lactose

Depending on the severity of GVHD and which part of the gut is affected, you may be required to reduce lactose-containing foods and drinks only if you feel that it makes your diarrhoea worse. To reduce the lactose in your diet, try:

- Reduced lactose milk such Zymil, Digestalact or soy milk.
- Cultured yoghurt (e.g. Vaalia, Yoplait), hard cheese and cream are usually OK.
- Supplements such as Resource, Resource Plus, Ensure and Ensure Plus are all suitable for lactose intolerance.
- Re-introduce small amounts of milk and dairy products at a time.

Fat

If you find that eating high fat foods makes your diarrhoea worse you may want to avoid high fat foods. For example:

- Avoid greasy take-away foods and fried foods or eat in small amounts at a time.
- Use only moderate amounts of fats and oils during cooking and moderate amounts of margarine or butter on bread and toast.

Vitamins/Minerals

If you are on steroid treatment, you may have an increased need for calcium and vitamin D. Check with your Doctor to see if you require any supplements.
Final tips...

- Monitor your weight weekly and contact your Dietitian if weight gain is slow or if you keep losing weight.
- If you are immuno-compromised or less then 3 months from your transplant it is important to still follow food safety guidelines and avoid high risk foods. Ask your Dietitian for a copy of these guidelines.