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Living with HIV

HIV and Nutrition and Food Safety

Last Reviewed: January 14, 2020

Key Points

- In people with HIV, good nutrition supports overall health and helps maintain the [immune system](#). Good nutrition also helps people with HIV maintain a healthy weight and absorb HIV medicines.
- Food and water can be contaminated with germs that cause illnesses (called foodborne illnesses or food poisoning).
- Because HIV damages the immune system, foodborne illnesses are likely to be more serious and last longer in people with HIV than in people with a healthy immune system.
- Food safety is about how to select, handle, prepare, and store food to prevent foodborne illnesses. Following food safety guidelines reduces the risk of foodborne illnesses.

Why is good nutrition important for people living with HIV?

Good nutrition is about finding and maintaining a healthy eating style. Good nutrition supports overall health and helps maintain the [immune system](#). It also helps people with HIV maintain a healthy weight and absorb HIV medicines.

HIV attacks and destroys the immune system, which makes it harder for the body to fight off infections. People with HIV take a combination of HIV medicines (called an [HIV treatment regimen](#)) every day. The HIV medicine prevents HIV from destroying the immune system. A healthy diet also

helps strengthen the immune system and keep people with HIV healthy.

What is a healthy diet for people living with HIV?

In general, the basics of a healthy diet are the same for everyone, including people with HIV.

- Eat a variety of foods from the five food groups: fruits, vegetables, grains, protein foods, and dairy.
- Eat the right amount of food to maintain a healthy weight.
- Choose foods low in [saturated fat](#), sodium (salt), and added sugars.

To learn more about healthy eating, visit the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA's) [ChooseMyPlate.gov website](#).

Can HIV or HIV medicines cause nutrition-related problems?

HIV and HIV medicines can sometimes cause nutrition-related problems. For example, some HIV-related infections can make it hard to eat or swallow. Side effects from HIV medicines such as loss of appetite, nausea, or diarrhea can make it hard to stick to an HIV regimen. If you have HIV and are having a nutrition-related problem, talk to your health care provider.

To avoid nutrition-related problems, people with HIV must also pay attention to food safety.

What is food safety?

Food and water can be contaminated with germs that cause illnesses (called foodborne illnesses or food poisoning). Food safety is about how to select, handle, prepare, and store food to prevent foodborne illnesses.

Why is food safety important for people living with HIV?

Because HIV damages the immune system, foodborne illnesses are likely to be more serious and last longer in people with HIV than in people with a healthy immune system. Following food safety guidelines reduces the risk of foodborne illnesses.

What steps can people with HIV take to prevent foodborne illnesses?

If you have HIV, follow these food safety guidelines to reduce your risk of foodborne illnesses:

Don't eat or drink the following foods:

- Raw eggs or foods that contain raw eggs, for example, homemade cookie dough
- Raw or undercooked poultry, meat, and seafood
- Unpasteurized milk or dairy products and fruit juices

Follow the four basic steps to food safety: clean, separate, cook, and chill.

- **Clean:** Wash your hands, cooking utensils, and countertops often when preparing foods.

- **Separate:** Separate foods to prevent the spread of any germs from one food to another. For example, keep raw meat, poultry, seafood, and eggs separate from foods that are ready to eat, including fruits, vegetables, and breads.
- **Cook:** Use a food thermometer to make sure that foods are cooked to safe temperatures.
- **Chill:** Refrigerate or freeze meat, poultry, eggs, seafood, or other foods that are likely to spoil within 2 hours of cooking or purchasing.



For more information, visit the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's (FDA's) [Food Safety for People with HIV/AIDS webpage](#). If you are planning a trip outside the United States, read the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC's) [Traveling with HIV fact sheet](#).

This fact sheet is based on information from the following sources:

From the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA):

- [Guide for HIV/AIDS Clinical Care: Nutrition](#)

From CDC:

- [Healthy Living with HIV](#)

From the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs:

- [Diet and Nutrition for People with HIV](#)

From FDA:

- [Food Safety for People with HIV/AIDS](#)

From USDA:

- [ChooseMyPlate.gov](#)