

# Diet

‘To equip people affected by CFS / ME with the skills for self-management towards a better quality of life’.



*Pride in our older people's and adult community services*

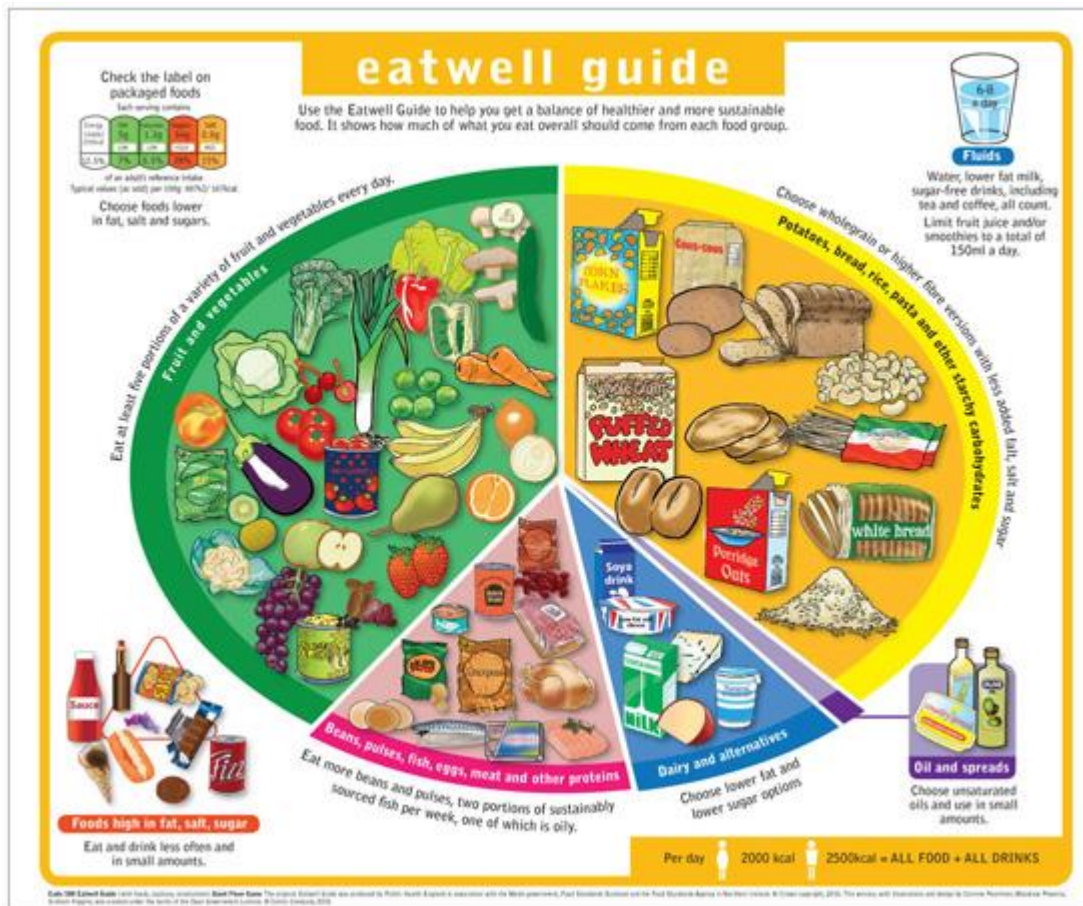
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## Diet and CFS/ME

All parts of the body including our muscles, brain, heart, and liver require energy to work. This energy comes from the food we eat. Therefore it is very important to fuel your body with a healthy balanced diet to keep it at its best.

Use the Eatwell plate as a guide to ensure your diet contains a variety of foods from each of the following groups:



The Association of UK Dietitians has published a food fact sheet for Chronic Fatigue Syndrome. Please look on their website for further information:

<https://www.bda.uk.com/foodfacts/home>

## How often should I eat?

Many people find that eating smaller meals are better than 3 big meals. This is especially helpful if you feel nauseated with food. It can also help with activity levels as the body then gets a constant supply of nutrients and sugar rather than bursts which make activity harder to regulate. It seems to help if you can have meals at a regular time as your body gets more used to food.

### Are there foods I should eat more of?

There is some evidence that low iron stores are associated with fatigue. It seems sensible to make sure that you eat a diet which has iron in it. Iron can be found in all meats, oily fish, shell fish, egg yolk, dried fruits, and fortified breakfast cereals. Iron absorption is increased by vitamin C. Vitamin C is also important to deal with the stress the body goes



through with CFS/ME. Vitamin C can be found in: fruits especially citrus fruits, berries, tomatoes, kiwis, dark green vegetables and potatoes. We would therefore recommend that you try and include these in your diet. We would not recommend you take them as supplements without discussing this with your Doctor or dietician, as some of the supplements have side effects which may affect you if you have CFS/ME.

### Are there foods and drinks I should avoid?



Some people find it helpful to try and avoid too much sugary food and drink. This is because sugar can give you a burst of energy but this is followed by a low which can make functioning with CFS/ME even more difficult. Avoiding caffeine loaded drinks such as coffee, tea and energy drinks (Red Bull, PowerAde, and Lucozade)

provide a high energy boost initially but this is often short lived and causes people to feel worse within a short period of time.

### Irritable Bowel Syndrome

Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) is an associated symptom of CFS/ME. Some symptoms of IBS include wind and/or bloating, diarrhoea, constipation, or both, low abdominal pain and a possible increase in symptoms after eating a meal.

If you are experiencing any of the above symptoms it is important to try and eat regular meals and avoid eating meals later in the evening. Try to take your time when eating, sit down to eat and chew your food well.

The Association of UK Dietitians has published a food fact sheet for Irritable Bowel Syndrome and diet. Please look on their website for further information

<https://www.bda.uk.com/foodfacts/home>

**Exercise** is often recommended to reduce the symptoms of IBS. Please refer to our separate information leaflet about a graded approach to your exercise and how to build on activity levels by using Graded Exercise Therapy (GET) principles.



**Stress** can increase IBS symptoms. Please refer to our separate information leaflet regarding relaxation and ways of managing stress more effectively.

Some things that may help:

- Cut down on caffeine (found in coffee, teas and fizzy drinks).
- Cut down or increase insoluble fibre in your diet (wholegrain bread, bran, cereals, nuts and most seeds) - some people find benefit from having more, or less, fibre. This will be a bit of trial and error depending on your own symptoms.
- Eat regular meals and don't eat too fast, don't skip meals or leave too long between meals.
- Drink at least eight glasses of water or fluid a day.
- Cut down on alcohol and fizzy drinks.
- Eat less starch, found in processed or re-cooked foods.



Examples of low and high fibre foods:

Foods high in Fibre	Foods lower in Fibre
<p><b>Cereals:</b> wholemeal, wholegrain, granary breads, cereals, muesli's, porridge biscuits and crackers, oatcakes, pasta and rice.</p>	<p><b>Cereals:</b> White bread, pasta, rice and pasta, noodles crackers, plain biscuits, sponges, scones, Cornflakes, Rice Krispies.</p>
<p><b>Fruit and Vegetables :</b> Jacket potato skins, raw vegetables, course vegetables (e.g. broccoli, sprouts, celery, cabbage, green beans, onions), pulse vegetables (e.g. peas, sweetcorn, beans), salad vegetables, fruit skins, seeds and pith, dried fruit (e.g. prunes, raisins)</p>	<p><b>Fruit and Vegetables:</b> Mashed and new potato, tender root vegetables(e.g. carrots, turnip, swede), flesh of tomatoes, tinned tomatoes, peeled, stewed and tinned fruit, ripe bananas, fresh fruit juice.</p>
<p><b>Miscellaneous:</b> Nuts and foods containing nuts.</p>	<p><b>Miscellaneous:</b> Jelly, ice cream</p>

## Food allergy and intolerance

CFS/ME may affect or be affected by the immune system, but exactly how is currently still unknown. Many people with CFS/ME report an improvement in symptoms after a change in diet. However, any food related problems are more likely to be food intolerances, (not affecting the immune system), rather than true food allergies (British Dietetic Association 2012). Keeping a food and symptom diary may be an effective way of helping to identify troublesome foods. If problems with food intolerance persist then speaking to your GP about a referral to a dietician may be worth considering.

## Supplements

There is need for further research in this area. There is not enough evidence on the use of supplements for this condition and the NICE guidelines for CFS/ME (2007) do not support the prescribing of these due to low evidence of their effectiveness. Some patients have discussed taking various different supplements and report feeling some improvement to their CFS/ME symptoms as a result. If you are considering taking supplements it is important to stay within the safe limits recommended by the Food Standards Agency (FSA). There is more information on the FSA website ([www.eatwell.gov.uk](http://www.eatwell.gov.uk)).

## Nausea

If nausea is a problem then consideration of snacking on starchy foods, eating little and often, and sipping drinks slowly can be helpful.

Often people report eating breakfast to be a particular challenge. Consider the use of fruit smoothies to provide your body with nutrients until you feel able to eat smaller snacks or meals.

If this doesn't work, or your symptoms are particularly severe, you may be offered drugs to control the nausea.



## Glycaemic Index (GI) diet



The Glycaemic Index (GI) is simply a ranking of carbohydrate foods based on the rate at which they raise blood glucose levels. Each food is given a number value:

- Foods that break down quickly will cause blood glucose levels to rise quickly, and are therefore given a high GI value.
- Foods that break down slowly will raise blood glucose levels slowly and are therefore given a low GI value.

Below are a few examples of low and high GI foods.

Low GI foods	Hi GI foods
Pasta (choose tomato based sauces) Grainy breads (e.g. soya, linseed and granary) Bran based cereals Porridge and reduced sugar muesli Sweet potatoes and new boiled potatoes in their skins Nuts (limit to a small handful – 1oz a day) Fruits Vegetables (raw or lightly cooked) Salad (choose low fat dressings) Basmati rice	Pies Sweet pastries Sugar rich drinks Doughnuts Croissants Shortbread

## GI and weight loss

There is good scientific evidence that GI influences our blood glucose levels. Slow, steady rises and falls in glucose may in addition help you feel full for longer. GI can play a role in weight management by helping to control appetite and insulin levels.

## GI facts

- Most low GI foods (e.g. wholegrain, pasta, fruit, beans, lentils and vegetables) are generally inherently healthy. Basing your diet on low GI foods can help you to keep to healthy eating guidelines.

- Foods with high GI are not necessarily 'unhealthy' foods. Compare watermelon (high GI food) with chocolate pudding (low GI food).
- The way a food is cooked or processed can affect the GI.
- When you mix foods together the GI changes. So a high GI food (jacket potato) when mixed with a low GI food (baked beans) becomes a medium GI meal. Therefore it makes good nutritional sense to add a salad or vegetables to a meal as this helps to lower the overall GI.
- Carbohydrate free foods, such as meat and cheese are considered to have a zero GI. However the leaner cuts of meat and lower fat dairy foods should be chosen for a healthy diet.
- GI is not supposed to be used in isolation.

### So, how can we use GI?

- The greatest research is in the area of diabetes. The European Association for the Study of Diabetes recommends a high fibre, low GI foods as a means of improving blood glucose and weight control.
- GI can benefit weight management when combined with a reduced calorie intake and regular physical activity.
- Some low GI foods, such as those that are high in soluble fibre (e.g. beans and lentils) can help reduce blood cholesterol as part of a healthy diet.
- Low GI foods, e.g. pasta, are great for carbohydrate loading before a sports event and high GI foods, e.g. glucose drink, provide fast release carbohydrate, quickly replacing glucose in the blood stream after an event.
- A diet based mainly on low GI foods may improve insulin sensitivity (insulin is the hormone that controls blood glucose).
- A low GI diet, along with lifestyle changes may benefit those with Metabolic Syndrome X (a condition characterised by reduced insulin sensitivity, obesity, high blood pressure and abnormal blood fats).

The Nutrition and Dietetic Service in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough NHS Foundation Trust have produced leaflets on Coping with Sickness, Low Fibre Diet, High Fibre Diet and Sources of Iron which can be provided by the CFS/ME Service on request. **Please note dietary advice can only be offered by the Nutrition and Dietetic Service if a referral has been made to them. Service users are therefore advised not to contact the Nutrition & Dietetic team directly.**



## **Useful Resources**

The Association of UK Dietitians – <https://www.bda.uk.com/>

## **Apps**

Easy Meals (plan and eat healthier meals) - <https://apps.beta.nhs.uk/easy-meals/>

Smart Recipes (plan meals and shopping lists) - <https://apps.beta.nhs.uk/smart-recipes/>

## Adult CFS / ME Service

Tel: 0330 7260077 – option 2

Email: [cpm-tr.cfsme@nhs.net](mailto:cpm-tr.cfsme@nhs.net)

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### Patient Advice and Liaison Service

For information about CPFT services or to raise an issue, contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on Freephone 0800 376 0775, or e-mail [pals@cpft.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@cpft.nhs.uk)

### Out-of-hours service for CPFT mental health service users

Please call **NHS 111** for health advice and support.

If you require this information in another format such as braille, large print or another language, please let us know.

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CPFT supports the **HeadtoToe Charity** – visit [www.HeadToToeCharity.org](http://www.HeadToToeCharity.org) for details on how you can help



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