



## Nutrition in recovery from Anorexia Nervosa

Recovering from the malnutrition (underweight & growth delay) experienced in AN is hard work:

- Firstly, people experiencing malnutrition & in the early stages of nutrition rehabilitation from malnutrition can become medically unwell and so should be seeing their doctor regularly. (Your doctor will manage any electrolyte or body salts problems medically).
- Food is the medicine for recovery from malnutrition. To fully recover from malnutrition (ie to recover weight and restart normal growth) people need to build up to eating more than most people might expect and enjoy, for some weeks and months.
- Being in a malnourished or starved state causes a number of symptoms that may make it hard to accomplish meals easily: feeling full quickly and for a prolonged time, suppressed appetite, being more worried, anxious and indecisive, and feeling that you can't stop thinking about food. In eating disorders people have become worried about how much to eat and fearful about their weight.
- The aim of nutrition in recovery is to supply sufficient energy (from protein, carbohydrates & fats) ie food to rebuild lost tissue. In addition, any insufficiencies in vitamins & minerals intake must be replaced. Generally speaking increasing food intake will replace most of the micronutrient deficits, but some people may require additional iron, zinc or calcium. A multi vitamin & mineral supplement (at the 'Recommended Dietary Intake' dosage) may be useful.
- Ordinary, everyday family foods are recommended. Most people need to re-introduce more bread & cereal foods, more milk and milk products, more meat and protein rich foods, more healthy fat rich foods and some treat or 'sometimes' foods they will have eliminated from their diet. No specialized foods are required. However foods like Sustagen or Ensure may be helpful if you are having trouble eating enough.

### Fuel needs for weight restoration

Initially an underweight / malnourished person will have lower than expected food needs and will restore weight and health by building up to an intake of 1500 – 2000kcal (6 – 8 MJ) daily. (Aiming for an approx. weight gain rate of 500g/week.) **See below for an example of meals suitable for this initial step.**

Within a few weeks most people will find they require more than this and will need to increase their intake to around 3000kcal (12.5MJ) or more in order to fully recover and return to full physical health. This translates into a plan of meals providing **at least the following**:

#### • 3 regular meals + 3 regular snacks:

- Each meal consisting of : 2 generous courses + nourishing drink
- Each snack consisting of: a generous snack to eat + nourishing drink

### See document “My plan for restoring my weight and health” for an example of meals for ongoing weight and health recovery

It is important to remember that weight may appear to increase quickly for the first week or two. This is mostly due to improved hydration, as people experiencing malnutrition are usually dehydrated. It is recommended you work closely with a doctor & dietitian at this time. This will be in addition to psychological support from a counsellor.