Forming Good Nutritional Habits

January 10, 2014 By Karen Hoyt

We tend to think of habits as something to give up. What if a habit was good for you? It is easy to feel out of control when you learn you have Hepatitis C. Getting that diagnosis can propel you into a world that is filled with frustration. You look down at your body and feel disconnected. Everything you thought was true now seems to be shaky. While you are learning about the Hepatitis C Virus, treatment options, and recovery, it is helpful to look for things that you have power over. One of those things is nutrition. The quickest way to feel better fast with Hepatitis C is to form good nutritional habits.

Our liver metabolizes everything that we eat. When you have the Hepatitis C virus it is important to protect your liver from having to work so hard. Keep in mind that a good diet will NOT cure the virus and does NOT substitute for medication. However, the proper foods can work with the medication to help keep your body in balance while fighting the Hep C Dragon. When my liver decompensated, I was refused treatment. By proving to my doctor that I could make changes, I was able to survive and get rid of the virus! Making some adjustments was easy when my life was counting on it.

Hepatitis C is hard on your body's organs. You are not able to process foods as easily. Sugary and high fat foods place an extra burden on your liver. Every cell in your body depends on the liver doing its' work. If you are getting ready for treatment, you can fortify your strength by eating well. During treatment, your doctor may advise a special diet. Be sure and have easy to eat foods to take with each dose. I learned that even ice cream was okay on those occasions when nothing else sounded good. Sometimes nausea, fatigue or body aches make it hard to eat well. While it is important to eat well, you also have to keep up your strength during treatment!

You want to feel better. You want to heal. How quickly you do that depends on how well you take care of yourself, especially with Hepatitis C. Here are some simple steps that YOU can take to help you feel better before, during, and after treatment.Start Right - It all starts at the supermarket. If you have the proper food on hand, then the decision to eat better is easier to follow through with. Make an effort to take a shopping list with you and stick to it. Try to stay away from the snack and cookie aisle. Foods that are empty calories can make you feel worse and leave you hungry quicker too! I remember walking up and down the aisles at the store thinking everything was going to kill me. I had to learn how to shop, cook and eat. It is not so hard once you get the hang of it.

Rearranging your kitchen can help you to jump start some new nutritional habits. You may need to put the microwave popcorn out of sight and set a box of mini-wheat cereal where you can grab it quickly. Leave the toaster on the counter for those times when you need to get some nutrition and you do not feel like cooking. One thing I do is boil several eggs at once. Then when I feel sluggish, it is easy to grab a quick bite of protein that is easy on the liver and delivers some energy!

Eat several small meals a day. When you wake up, your body has been fasting for hours. Your blood

sugar is low. Your muscles are looking for protein and carbohydrates to get your body going for the day. A whole grain cereal or bread is an excellent choice because it burns slowly and does not overwhelm your liver. They are also a good protein source. Consider adding some nuts to your oatmeal for a crunchy treat. Eggs or yogurt can be enjoyed, but it is best to avoid eating red meat at every meal. You might try some of the protein shakes that come in powder form or are already mixed. You can add fruit to them and have a complete meal. Coffee is a good start for your day and also has benefits for the liver. Carry snacks with you when you have to go out. That will help you avoid the temptation to grab a fast meal on the go. Fried potatoes or fast food sandwiches have a lot of fat and sodium. Fat is hard for your liver to process. Sodium is not good for your heart and can create a problem called ascites. Ascites is when your body retains too much fluid and it builds up in your abdomen creating a painful and toxic situation.

Don’t fool yourself. It is important to be realistic when you begin changing your diet habits. I was thrust into a situation where my liver failed. I had no choice but to make radical changes and it was hard. I did not even have a corn tortilla chip for a few months. Then I found a low sodium brand and realized that I could have 15 a day! By treating myself to a few of my favorite snacks I was able to stick with the plan.

Keep it simple. Do not try to do everything at once. Instead, make a few changes at a time. Start out by purchasing more fresh fruit. Go to the frozen food section for vegetables instead of cans for less sodium and more nutrition.

I can promise you that eating healthy is one of the best things you can do for yourself with Hepatitis C or liver disease. I hear from readers every day who are feeling more energetic, gaining strength, and winning the battle against Hepatitis C through nutrition. Eating to live will be one of the easiest and habits that you will ever take up. Who would have thought that we could start a habit that would be fun and also reward us with a longer healthier life?

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