

AGEING WELL

FACTSHEETS

sia spinal
injuries
association
FOR LIFE AFTER SPINAL CORD INJURY



NUTRITION

Nutrition

Nutrition and its relationship to Ageing with a SCI

Ageing

A vital part of ageing well is eating well and maintaining a healthy weight. Food is our body's fuel. As well as sustaining life, food has a role in preventing or managing many lifestyle diseases such as high blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes and certain types of cancer. Food also helps the body to fight infection and aids healing. Equally important, food plays a central role in many social activities and gives us great pleasure!



As we age calorie (energy) requirements fall. SCI people already have lower calorie requirements than the non-disabled population and tetraplegics need less energy (calories) than paraplegics due to lower muscle mass.

However, eating less food means that the focus should be on the quality of that food. Quality rather than quantity is the key here.



In the SIA Ageing Well Survey 2007, respondents cited weight control as their 4th most important concern after bowel, bladder and skin care issues.

We all need to eat a variety of good quality food

Including foods from the following groups will help us to eat what our bodies need each day

- **Protein foods** – Protein is essential for tissue repair, fighting illness and disease, carrying nutrients through the body and producing hormones to name just a few roles. High quality sources of protein include lean meat, chicken and fish, eggs, dried beans, and nuts.
- **Fruit and vegetables** – Provide us with several essential vitamins and minerals, fibre and also beneficial substances called phytochemicals. A minimum of 5 portions per day is recommended to ensure adequate daily intake of these essential nutrients.



10.5% of survey participants never achieve 5 portions of fruit and vegetables a day

- **Dairy products** are rich in calcium which helps to maintain bone density. The aim is for 3 serves a day.



Most respondents in the survey never achieve 3 serves of dairy a day – 77%.

- **Breads and cereals** - Wholegrain or fortified varieties are rich in B vitamins and fibre. Assists nerve function and blood production.
- **Fluid** – Drink sufficient for your needs (more than 2 litres a day unless medical restrictions apply). Base your fluid intake around water but you can count other types of beverages in your fluid intake for the day.
- **Fibre** – Both soluble fibre from fruit and vegetables and insoluble fibre from pasta, rice, wholemeal bread are necessary to a balanced diet.

The right amount of the right fibre is important to establish and maintain stool consistency, aiding bowel management.

How ageing may affect your food intake

Taste

With advancing years we have fewer taste buds and may lose our natural ability to taste food, which in turn affects our enjoyment. We may be tempted to add more salt and sugar! Experiment with herbs and spices instead.

Dentition

Enjoyment of food may be affected by the need to wear dentures and poorly fitting dentures make food hard to chew. Swallowing difficulties may also influence and restrict the type of food you can eat.

Dexterity

This may already be a problem or become a more of a problem over time and you may have difficulty cutting up your food and feel reluctant to ask for help. There are many aids on the market for assisting with food preparation, eating and drinking.

Mobility

This can decrease with age and food shopping may become increasingly difficult. Make use of one of the food companies who deliver ready made meals to your door. If you have problems cooking, you can apply for Meals on Wheels through your local authority. There is a small charge for this service but you can pay in a variety of ways; by monthly invoice, cheque or cash on the day.

General health

If you are chronically tired or depressed your appetite may be affected. These factors combined with reduced taste sensation, make it is easy to lose interest in food and food preparation which potentially leads to snacking on high fat / high salt / sugary quick fixes.

Social

Living on your own and eating well is challenging due to the social aspects of preparing and eating food. Why not invite a friend, neighbour or family member around to eat with you once or twice a week. Get them to bring something and share the cost and experience. Find a social club you can eat at occasionally. Use healthy pre-made meals from the supermarket. Cook up extra amounts and freeze portions so you don't have to cook everyday. Think about other ideas that will help you to eat well and put the pleasure back into eating.

Financial

If your income is reduced, there could be a temptation to cut down on the food you buy. Be careful not to cut out healthy staple foods which are usually the cheapest £ for £. Pasta, rice and bread can be bought very reasonably as can fruit and vegetables in season. An example of how you pay more for processed foods is this: a bag of potatoes will cost around 60p/kg but frozen chips will cost in excess of £2/kg. Turn the potato into crisps and the cost soars up to £6 - £12/kg! Buy small amounts of perishables to avoid waste. Avoid stocking up on foods of poor nutritional quality such as sweet biscuits, cake, crisps, soft drink and confectionary. They tend to use up your food budget, are concentrated in calories, and yet are poor sources of vitamins, minerals and antioxidants.



Top Tips

- Breakfast is the most important meal of the day. Generally, don't skip meals.
29% of survey participants were not regularly eating three meals a day.
- Make sure you know how to interpret food labels so you can make the best quality choices. See the web sites below for more advice on portion sizes and quantities in general or speak to a dietitian.
- Stay safe with your food by making note of use by dates, preparing food on clean surfaces and cooking raw meat, especially chicken, thoroughly.
- A rich source of nutrients can be found just under the skin of fruit and vegetables so don't throw away the goodness by over-peeling (or overcooking) and eat the skin when you can.

- Remember that staple, unprocessed foods are most often the cheapest £ for £.
 - Experiment with new foods and aim to eat a wide variety of foods.
 - Avoid being either overweight or underweight –each is bad for your health.
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Summary

Eating good quality food and drinking sufficient fluids will help to: maintain a healthy weight; reduce the risk of developing lifestyle diseases; assist in the management of heart disease and diabetes; keep the skin healthy which in turn helps prevent pressure ulcers; encourage regular bowel and bladder function and fight infections. Food also plays an important social role and is a very pleasurable aspect of life.

Useful contacts

British Nutrition Foundation

W: www.nutrition.org.uk/
(for some great resources)

British Dietetic Association

T: 0121 200 8080
W: www.bda.uk.com

Diabetes UK

Careline: 0845 120 2960
W: www.diabetes.org.uk

British Heart Foundation

Main Line: 020 7935 0185
Heart Information Line: 08450 70 80 70 (open Mon, Tues, Fri 9am-5pm and Weds, Thurs 8am-6pm)
W: www.bhf.org.uk

Further reading

SIA Guide on *Diet and Exercise* available from the SIA Web Site.

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ABOUT SIA



The Spinal Injuries Association (SIA) is the leading national user-led charity for spinal cord injured (SCI) people. Being user led, we are well placed to understand the everyday needs of living with spinal cord injury and are here to meet those needs by providing key services to share information and experiences, and to campaign for change ensuring each person can lead a full and active life. We are here to support you from the moment your spinal cord injury happens, and for the rest of your life.

For more information contact us via the following:

Spinal Injuries Association
SIA House
2 Trueman Place
Oldbrook
Milton Keynes
MK6 2HH

T: 01908 604 191 (Mon – Fri 9am – 5pm)

T: 0800 980 0501 (Freephone Advice Line, Mon – Fri, 11am – 1pm/2pm – 4.30pm)

W: www.spinal.co.uk

E: sia@spinal.co.uk

Charity No: 1054097

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PLEASE SUPPORT SIA

SIA relies on fundraising, donations and gifts in wills to provide services that help spinal cord injured people rebuild their lives.

With your help, we can provide the right support to spinal cord injured people and their families and friends so they can enjoy a full and independent life after injury. Your donation today will go towards changing someone's life.

I would like to give: £15 £20 £53 other amount £.....

Method of payment

I enclose a cheque/postal order/CAF voucher made payable to Spinal Injuries Association.

I would like to pay by Mastercard/Visa/Maestro/Switch (delete as appropriate)

Card number

Start date

Expiry Date

Security Code

Signature

Date/...../.....

Name.....

Address

.....

Postcode Tel no.....

Email address.....

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Please send your donation to: FREEPOST SPINAL INJURIES ASSOCIATION or you can donate online at www.spinal.co.uk

Thank you for your support!