

Nutrition When Unwell

When a child is unwell, they often lose their appetite. This is common for all children, however for children with CF can cause extra worry for parents. It is important to offer your child foods and drinks they can tolerate during this period. If your child is frequently unwell, your dietitian will assess and provide individual recommendations for your child's needs.

It is also important to be aware of dehydration during illness. Fluid and salt supplementation are very important during this time. Small, frequent offering of any fluid including chocolate milk or juice can help your child meet their hydration needs. Discuss any concerns with your CF team.

Loss Of Appetite

Loss of appetite is common when not feeling well. In times of prolonged poor appetite, you can try the following:

- Offer small, frequent meals/snacks 5-6 x per day for example, cheese and crackers, simple sandwiches, or any of your child's preferred foods
- Keep food on a small plate to avoid overwhelming your child.
- Sometimes drinks are easier managed when unwell. Offer milk-based drinks such as plain and flavoured milk or smoothies.
- Fresh air and gentle physical activity such as going for a short walk may be helpful.



Hospital Admissions

If your child requires a hospital admission to PCH, nutrition will be an important component of their recovery. All main meals and snacks are catered for by the hospital, however if they have any extra dietary needs, you should tell staff upon admission, and they will cater for your child as best they can.

At PCH, you can select your child's meals from an electronic menu using the TV in the room. The menu items offered will depend on your child's age, dietary needs and allergy requirements.

You are able to bring preferred foods from home you know your child likes. CF inpatients can request a fridge for their room to store food and drinks. However, availability is not always guaranteed.

You can also ask to speak with the CF dietitian if you need more support or information about food options during the admission.

Here are some tips to optimise diet during an admission:

- Encourage your child to order their own meals/assist them.
- Utilise booster option for example, add butter or margarine to veggies, add cream to soup.
- Order double serves.
- Utilise snack boxes so your child has food readily available in between mealtimes.
- Bring foods from home if able to increase variety.

Supplemental Feeding

If despite having a good, high calorie diet, your child is struggling to put on weight, the CF care team may recommend a form of supplemental feeding to help gain weight.

Supplemental feeds can be delivered directly through a feeding tube via the nose or stomach, known as a Percutaneous Endoscopic Gastrostomy (PEG). This allows high calorie liquid meals to be delivered directly into the stomach. Feed plans are individualised to best meet the needs of your child and family for example feeds can be given while your child is sleeping and allow them the freedom to enjoy normal meals and activities during the day.

Although having a feeding tube might seem daunting, it can be really helpful in enabling your child to gain weight and can take off a lot of pressure around food and eating. If a feeding tube is recommended for your child, it will be discussed in detail by members of your child's CF team.

Thank you to Jordan Brockett and Mylie McMahon, CF Dietitians, Perth Children's Hospital, for input into this factsheet.

Last reviewed August 2023.