

SPECIAL DIETS – Helpful Information

Baby's needs – Pregnancy

\$25 per month

Good nutrition during pregnancy is essential to ensure healthy development of the baby as well as the mother's health. Poor nutrition during pregnancy can result in preterm birth and low birth weight which can compromise optimal child development in the short and longer term. The body's basal metabolic rate (the number of calories you use each day) during pregnancy will increase, and more calories are needed to support fetal development. Although additional calorie intake is often not necessary in the first trimester, during the second and third trimesters an extra 200 to 300 calories per day, made up of nutritious food choices, are generally recommended. Pregnant women should seek the advice of a doctor or dietician regarding their own unique situation.

In addition to a healthy diet, women of childbearing age or planning to get pregnant should take a daily prenatal vitamin containing folic acid. Research has demonstrated that taking folic acid prior to conception and during pregnancy reduces the risk of neural tube defects such as spinal bifida. Prenatal vitamins also contain other important nutrients including Iron, Calcium, and Vitamin D. Prenatal vitamins are available at pharmacies (with a doctor's prescription) using the **Health Benefits Card**.

Baby's needs – Breastfeeding

\$30 per month

Breastfeeding has been endorsed by health professionals including Health Canada as the best method of feeding infants as it provides optimal nutritional, immunological and emotional benefits for the growth and development of infants.

While breastfeeding, women should consume an additional 450 calories per day. It is recommended that women consume extra fruits and vegetables, whole grain breads, lean proteins, and skim or low fat dairy products. Breastfeeding mothers should avoid foods and drinks that contain alcohol, caffeine, excessive salt, sugar, fat or calories.

Health Canada recommends that breastfeeding mothers continue to take a multivitamin containing folic acid every day. Prenatal vitamins contain folic acid and are available at pharmacies (with a doctor's prescription) using the **Health Benefits Card**.

Baby's needs – Infant Formula

up to \$200 per month or by HBEC approval

Good nutrition in infancy continues to be vital to healthy development. In cases where the baby is not being breastfed, numerous infant formulas are available through grocery and drug stores.

Often infants will have additional dietary needs. Pre-term infants and infants with low birth weight are at high risk for malnutrition and developmental delays. They will require special formulas that provide extra calories for energy and higher levels of protein, vitamins and minerals compared to full term formulas. One of these formulas, **Neosure**, has been added to the Drug Benefit List and is available using the **Health Benefits Card**.

Specialized formulas are also required by babies born with severe allergies (e.g. cow's milk protein allergy). Symptoms include colic, rash, eczema, wheezing and vomiting. **Alimentum, Nutramigen** and **Neocate** are hypoallergenic formulas and often recommended for these infants. Alimentum and Nutramigen A+ Oral Liquid and Oral Powder are regular benefits on the Drug Benefit List, available by using the Health Benefits Card. Nutramigen A++ and Neocate are available by Special Authorization on the Drug Benefit List. The physician seeks approval from Alberta Blue Cross and then the formula can be obtained from a pharmacy using the **Health Benefits Card**.

If **any other** formula is required, a request may be sent to the **Health Benefits Exception Committee** or funds may be issued as a Special Diet. If the cost exceeds the \$200/mth formula limit, the request **must** be sent to the **Health Benefits Unit for Director Approval by the Executive Director of Alberta Works Programs**. Please refer to [10 Supplementary Health Benefits/Special Diets](#) of the policy manual for rates and procedures.

Celiac/Gluten Free**\$80 per month**

People with celiac disease are unable to digest gluten. Gluten comes from grains like wheat, barley and rye; and is found in foods like bread, crackers, pasta, sauces, thickeners and processed meats like hot dogs and deli meats. With celiac disease the immune system harms the small intestine when these foods are eaten, making it hard for the body to absorb essential nutrients that keep it healthy.

To get well and stay well, all foods containing wheat, rye or barley must be eliminated, including beer and ale. Often milk and milk products must be avoided for the first few months.

Flours and starches made from rice, corn, buckwheat, potatoes, soybeans or tapioca are important substitutes in a gluten free diet. It is also essential to continue to eat foods from the other food groups, like fruit, vegetables, eggs, meat and fish. Milk products can usually be reintroduced after the first few months of treatment.

Diabetic**\$40 per month**

See Heart Healthy diet which contains essentially the same nutritional requirements.

Heart Healthy**\$40 per month**

A "heart healthy" diet is often prescribed for persons suffering from high blood pressure (hypertension), atherosclerosis (hardening and narrowing of the arteries), coronary artery disease or other vascular diseases, or to reduce the risks such as heart attack and stroke associated with high cholesterol, cardiovascular disease and related conditions such as obesity.

The heart healthy diet includes a wide variety of foods high in complex carbohydrates, fibre, vitamins and minerals, such as fruits, vegetables, grains, fish, legumes and beans. It is low in fat (low or non-fat dairy products, lean poultry and meats), cholesterol, salt and alcohol. Saturated, trans fats and cholesterol are limited and replaced by healthier fats such as mono and polyunsaturated fats from vegetables, fish, legumes and nuts.

High Calcium**\$20 per month**

Calcium is a mineral that is essential to the growth and maintenance of strong bones and for the proper function of nerves, muscles and kidneys. The body requires a constant supply of calcium and when there is not enough calcium available from one's diet, the body pulls what it needs from the bones. Not having enough calcium in the diet is one of the many factors associated with an increased risk of osteoporosis, a disease that speeds up the process of the natural loss of calcium in the bones. This causes the bones to become weak and fragile, leading to loss of height, curved spines and bone fractures, especially in women.

Dairy products including milk, cheese, and yogurt are an excellent source of Calcium. Other good sources include Calcium-fortified orange juice and soy milk, salmon, sardines, almonds and vegetables like broccoli, collard greens, spinach and kale.

High Calorie (over 2,500 calories)**\$36 per month**

High calorie foods will provide more energy for daily activities, and are recommended for people who need to improve their nutrition, gain weight, and boost energy. Certain health conditions increase the body's need for calories, including Cancer, HIV, and AIDS. Other conditions that increase calorie needs include wounds (such as ulcers), trauma, burns, weight loss and malnutrition. This type of diet might also be recommended if one needs to gain weight and get stronger after a surgery or illness.

Calories can be added to the diet by using alternatives like whole milk, juices, milkshakes, butter, cheese, ice cream, honey, pudding, granola bars, and dried fruits. Eating small meals more frequently or adding nutritious snacks between meals are strategies for increasing nutritional and caloric intake.

Note: Often high calorie and high protein diets are prescribed and necessary for the same health condition.

High Fibre**\$20 per month**

Fibre is a part of plant based foods that the human body cannot digest. Insoluble fibre cannot be digested by the body and it provides bulk to improve digestion and prevent constipation. Soluble fibre can be partially digested by the body and can help to lower blood cholesterol. When combined with a low-fat diet, eating more fibre can reduce the risk of heart disease and other chronic diseases, including cancer. Adding fibre to the diet is often recommended for those with diverticulosis and irritable bowel syndrome.

Sources of insoluble fibre include whole grain breads and cereals, brown rice, and vegetables and fruit. Good sources of soluble fibre include oats, beans, peas, chickpeas and lentils.

High Protein**\$20 per month**

A high protein diet provides energy and will help build, maintain and repair the body. A high protein diet is recommended for people who need to improve their nutrition, gain weight, and boost energy. Certain health conditions increase the body's need for protein, including Cancer, HIV, and AIDS. Other conditions that increase protein needs include wounds (such as ulcers), trauma, burns, weight loss and malnutrition. This type of diet might also be recommended if one needs to gain weight and get stronger after a surgery or illness.

High-protein foods include choices like cheese, milk powder, eggs, yogurt, seeds, nuts, tofu, lentils, peas, beans, fish, beef, chicken and pork.

Note: Often high protein and high calorie diets are prescribed and necessary for the same health condition.

HIV / AIDS / Hepatitis C**\$36 per month**

For people living with **HIV and AIDS**, a healthy diet is one of the critical factors that help fight infection, build up the immune system, fight disease and anemia, prevent weight loss and malnutrition, and help to ensure that medications work. People with HIV who are asymptomatic and at an ideal weight need 30-40 calories per kg body weight per day. A 70 kg (154 pound) person needs 2100-2800 calories per day. Those who have already experienced weight loss, malnutrition, or have other complicating diseases may require additional calories and nutrients.

Nutritional issues are common with HIV, because of the HIV infection itself or due to the effects of the antiretroviral therapy. Managing nutrition related symptoms like poor appetite, fatigue, nausea, diarrhea, mouth sores and fever can make it difficult to eat. The digestive system is also affected resulting in inflammation, mal-absorption of nutrients and medicines, vitamin and mineral deficiencies, and weight loss.

Nutrient needs are also higher because the body has to work overtime to deal with the chronic viral infection as well as to fight off other opportunistic infections. Increased calories are required to maintain weight and additional dietary protein may be required to improve body cell mass. Complex carbohydrates like brown or wild rice, whole grain bread and pasta, oatmeal, whole grain cereals and granola, barley, fruits and vegetables are a healthy source of energy and provide fibre. People living with HIV and AIDS need higher amounts of protein from meats, fish, poultry, eggs, legumes (dried peas, beans, lentils), tofu, peanut and other nut butters, nuts and seeds, milk, skim milk powder, cheese, yogurt, and soy milk. Healthy fats from olive, flax and canola oil, salmon, sardines, herring, nuts, avocados are also important.

People with **hepatitis** or people with HIV/AIDS who are co-infected with hepatitis C, which attacks the liver, are even more at risk of nutritional problems. Hepatitis C is one of the driving forces behind the increasing prevalence of chronic liver disease. Liver disease affects nutrient digestion and absorption, storage and metabolism, which can lead to vitamin and mineral deficiencies and protein energy malnutrition. Much like HIV/AIDS, those with hepatitis C must often increase caloric intake for energy, ensure adequate protein intake for fighting infection and for liver regeneration, and increase vegetables and fruit to maximize free radical-fighting antioxidants.

Calorie containing supplements may be required for patients with volume intolerances or other

extraordinary needs. Products like **Boost** and **Ensure** can add calories, protein and other nutrients when one is not getting enough nutrition from regular foods. These products are available using the **Health Benefits Card**.

Low Cholesterol or Low Fat

\$20 per month

These diets are essentially the same, and often prescribed for people with high cholesterol, heart conditions, or other medical conditions like obesity.

High levels of cholesterol in the blood increase the chance of developing heart disease. The excess cholesterol tends to build up on artery walls, eventually reducing the supply of blood reaching the heart muscles and increasing the odds of heart attack and stroke. High fat intake tends to increase cholesterol levels; so if a person has a cholesterol problem, the doctor may recommend a low-fat diet.

To reduce fat and cholesterol it is important to bake, roast, boil, or broil meat, fish, and poultry; and avoid fried foods. Remove all fat from all meats and remove skin from poultry. When buying packaged foods, make sure no more than 30 percent of their total calories come from fat. Always buy low-fat or fat-free dairy products. If using margarine, choose one that is low in fat, or made with liquid oil.

Low or High Potassium

\$20 per month

Persons experiencing renal failure, insufficiency, or kidney transplant require a low potassium diet. The renal failure/ insufficiency special diet includes low potassium.

A low potassium diet may also be prescribed to treat hyperkalemia and other conditions, when the other components of the renal failure/insufficiency special diet are not required. A high potassium diet may be prescribed for such conditions as renal tubular acidosis. Certain medications can also cause imbalances in the levels of potassium in the body, and necessitate a low or high potassium diet.

Potassium is found in a variety of foods including bananas, baked potatoes, oranges, tomatoes, cantaloupe, peaches, hamburger, kidney beans, Brazil nuts, broccoli, papaya, prune juice and salmon. Adding or eliminating high potassium foods means making alternate selections in the vegetable, fruit, and grain food groups primarily.

Low Sodium

\$20 per month

A low sodium diet is often recommended for diabetics, those with heart disease or trying to reduce high blood pressure, or those with chronic kidney or liver disease. Too much sodium can also cause the body to retain fluid, which can collect in the hands, ankles, belly and lungs.

Low sodium diets limit salt and tend to have fewer processed foods like deli meats, smoked meats, bacon, processed cheese, prepared pancake and cake mixes, salted snack foods, commercial salad dressings and sauces, prepared soups and convenience foods.

A diet low in sodium includes more whole foods like fresh or frozen unsalted meats, milk, yogurt, low sodium cheeses, fruits, vegetables, low sodium breads, noodles, rice, fresh or dried herbs and spices.

Milk Free or Lactose Intolerance

\$50 per month

\$20 per month

The difference between these special diets is a matter of severity. Some people have intolerance to lactose. They experience gastrointestinal discomfort when drinking milk, but they can tolerate other dairy products such as cheese and yogurt as the process of making these products breaks down the lactose into a more digestible form. These people can drink the type of milk that has the lactose eliminated or reduced (this milk is a bit more expensive) or can take OTC pills that help their stomachs digest the lactose.

Other people have a severe allergy to dairy products and develop allergic symptoms when ingesting dairy products in any form. They need to avoid dairy products entirely. These people would need the milk free special diet.

Gastro intestinal problems such as irritable bowel syndrome could complicate simple lactose intolerance and therefore persons with these problems should be given the higher rate for the milk free diet.

Renal Failure/Insufficiency

\$110 per month

Renal failure or kidney failure is a situation in which the kidneys fail to function adequately. The kidneys filter the blood, remove waste products and help balance water, salt and other minerals in the blood. When the kidneys stop working, waste products, fluids and electrolytes build up in the body and can cause very serious health problems. The condition may be due to a large number of other medical problems.

This special diet is needed when a person is suffering from:

- renal/kidney failure or insufficiency
- end stage kidney disease, or
- the person is on the wait list for a kidney transplant or has had a transplant

If a person is suffering from diabetes or hypertension as well as renal failure/insufficiency, this special diet will meet their nutritional needs.