



## DIET AND RESPIRATORY DISEASE

### Facts about diet and respiratory disease

- Diet can significantly affect a person's health - including the lungs
- Food is the fuel that the body needs for everything it does, including breathing. The body takes food and the oxygen we breathe and converts it into energy and carbon dioxide, this process is called metabolism
- A healthy diet is important in helping the body fight infections. Chest infections are dangerous for people with lung conditions, so it is particularly important to maintain a healthy diet
- Some researchers have found a connection between the diet of a pregnant woman and her baby's chances of developing wheezing, allergy and asthma. A maternal diet low in vitamins gives the baby little protection against sensitisation to allergens, a frequent cause of lung problems. Research in Scotland and Saudi Arabia showed a similar link between asthma and a low vitamin diet
- When people with lung disease are unwell or feeling breathless, they will take less exercise which will result in a weakening of their muscles. Again a well balanced diet is needed with more high protein foods such as meat, fish, poultry and dairy products
- During an infection and during hot weather, people with respiratory disease should increase their fluid intake as they often produce secretions/mucus which they need to cough-up. If a person with lung disease does not drink enough, their secretions will be thick and sticky and their chances of an infection will be increased. At least four pints of liquid should be consumed a day, preferably water. This will also help with digesting food and avoiding constipation

### Obesity and respiratory disease

- If a person is overweight, their heart and lungs have to work much harder to supply oxygen to the body. Too much fat can also make it more difficult for the lungs to work properly
- Excess weight also results in poor lung expansion and poor lung clearance leading to atelectasis (postural lung collapse) at the bases of the lungs, resulting in the lungs being less effective
- Obesity is also a significant risk factor for sleep apnoea/hypopnoea. An apnoea is a breathing pause and hypopnoea is a marked reduction in breathing. During sleep, the muscles at the back of the throat, which normally keep the airways open, relax. If the throat narrows too much, the individual fights for breath until they wake themselves up. This is so brief that it is not normally recalled in the morning but is sufficient to activate the throat muscles again. The subject takes in a few deep breaths and then falls rapidly back to sleep and so the throat muscles relax again and further brief awakenings ensue

- This recurrent cycle of blockage, wakening, sleep, blockage, wakening, sleep, may happen up to once or twice per minute all night. The many hundreds of wakenings per night shatter sleep quality and are the main cause of daytime sleepiness - the major symptom of the sleep apnoea/hypopnoea syndrome

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