

Eating When Ill

Each year with the falling of leaves comes the rise of flu season, the running of noses, and rampage of general ill health. When sick, healthy eating is often the last thing on our minds. Most find themselves either having no appetite at all and eating nothing, or eating only high carbohydrate low nutrient-filled comfort foods. However, this is the time our bodies need the best nutrients to help fight off the illness the quickest.

Certainly, any recent weight loss efforts are lost until feeling better, and then it seems harder to get back on track as the hunger returns and often worsens. Why does the hunger worsen? If you eat comfort carb foods when ill, it increases the hormone insulin level in your body. High insulin levels stimulate appetite and cause carbohydrate cravings. This hunger spiral becomes hard to break once feeling better. Metabolism also changes between sick and healthy times which subsequently changes hunger. So, what can we do to help us get us through the sickness and back on track?

First, watch your **protein intake**. That is key for preventing lean muscle mass loss and repairing infected cells. It also helps maintain good water balance and decreases time of illness. Some common proteins are meats, eggs, cheese, tofu, soy, fish, nuts, certain beans. But when feeling ill, eggs and meat often don't sound appealing. Try instead an easily digestible protein such as tofu which is also mild tasting so is a good substitute for crackers. Protein shakes or protein bars are often a good choice too for someone not wanting to eat much, but keeping protein levels high. Protein is also a great energy source to help get you back on your feet quicker.

If you are not hungry when ill and **calorie** intake falls below about 1200 in females and 1600 in males, you will feel more fatigued, weak, and will further drop your metabolism down making weight loss efforts harder when you are better. Too many **carbohydrates** can also make you sleepy and bloated. If calories are too low, try some unsalted nuts like almonds or natural peanut butter. It's a great way get in some calories and protein and not a lot of carbohydrates. Additionally, take a standard **multivitamin** daily to maintain micronutrients when ill. Although whole healthy foods will provide better overall nutritional values, it's better than not getting in any micronutrients.

Help yourself too by **treating your symptoms**. If you're nauseated all day, you're not going to want to eat anything. Although a virus might just need to pass, it's OK to talk to your physician about medications or other ways to decrease the symptoms. **If crackers sound good because they are bland, try other bland lower carb foods like raw veggies, dry nuts, unflavored protein powder put in green tea, mozzarella cheese sticks, low carb plain yogurt**, etc. Don't underestimate the value of **sleep** as well. If coughing is keeping you up, get a stronger cough suppressant. A lack of sleep prolongs illness time, and increases carbohydrate cravings as your body relates food intake with energy needed to stay awake. Increase your daily sleep time by at least 2 hours when ill.

Although illness may occur at some point, working on these and other techniques will get you the ammunition you need to get back on track quicker. For other weight friendly tips and help, call Lexington's preferred **Non Surgical Weight loss facility: Medical Bariatrics of Lexington at (859) 263-SLIM (7546.)**