

### Weight Loss

The loss of weight, also known as cachexia, is one of the most common symptoms of HIV infection and can appear at any stage of infection. This is why you should be very aware of any irregular weight loss, above all when it is not intentional. Indeed it could be due to an HIV related infection or be a sign of disease. Malnutrition can reduce the immune system activity. This is why it is recommended to always maintain a complete and balanced diet.

#### What are the causes of a weight loss?

Weight loss happens when the body uses more nutrients than it receives from food. It can be due to several causes during HIV infection:

- HIV itself can increase the amount of nutrients needed by the body. In other words, it increases its metabolism.
- HIV itself can modify intestinal tissue and make the absorption of nutrients more difficult. This is known as "bad absorption".
- Other intestinal infections can also result in bad absorption and/or diarrhea.
- A loss of appetite resulting from an infection will make you eat less than you really need to.
- Other specific conditions such as mouth and throat infections can also make it harder for you to feed yourself.
- Some drugs can lower your appetite or cause secondary effects, such as nausea, vomiting, indigestion, and can change the flavor of food, making it harder for you to tolerate food.

#### How can weight loss be prevented?

The most important is to start treating all infections related to HIV as soon as possible and make sure that you eat properly. It is easier to avoid weight loss without to have to gain weight later.

After you have been diagnosed with HIV, it is highly recommended to go to a health center and ask to see a nutritionist, preferably specialized in HIV. He/she will be able to elaborate a special diet for you and adapt it to your metabolism in order to avoid weight loss.

The nutritionist can adapt your diet to include the most important types of nutrients and introduce the necessary changes for your diet to be best adapted to your treatment. This will permit you to control certain problems such as diarrhea. If necessary he/she can also recommend complementary food and drinks to improve your nutrition. This is particularly important during or just after the times when you are not feeling healthy.

If you have symptoms such as a loss of appetite, persistent nausea and/or serious nausea, you should go and see an HIV specialist as soon as possible. He/she will be the only one who can help you to find the exact cause of the weight loss and recommend you an appropriate treatment to lower the symptoms. If the problems are caused by any of the drugs included in your HIV treatment, he/she can also prescribe you other drugs.

It is also highly recommended to maintain good hygiene in food preparation. It is wise to cook your food well and to make sure it is always well conserved. These measures can help you to reduce the risk of getting intestinal infections such as Salmonella and Campilobacter. Amongst other basic precautions, it is recommended to boil water and avoid direct contact with human or animal stool in order to avoid parasitic infections such as Criptosporidium.

HIV treatments often result in a considerable gain of weight. This is why the choice of your HIV treatment is essential to avoid or rectify the loss of weight. One of the most beneficial strategies would be to make your immune system stronger in order to fight intestinal parasites such Criptosporidium and Microsporidium, which are hard to treat directly.

#### Make some efforts to gain weight

If you have lost weight after an HIV related infection, your nutritionist might recommend you to increase the amount of calories and proteins you are taking in order to gain more weight. He/she will sometimes recommend you to take appetite stimulators, although they tend to make you gain weight by accumulating fat, when what you really want is to gain muscle mass. This is why you have to talk to your nutritionist to determine your priorities and your options.

Some nutritionists can prescribe you anabolic steroids for a short period of time. In association with moderated physical exercises, they could help you increase your body mass.