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Nutrition

Good nutrition is a leading concern for the patient with ALS. The main concern is to provide adequate nutrients while preventing aspiration of food or liquids into the lungs which could lead to infection and pneumonia.

As the muscles around the face and throat weaken and the tongue and lips lose their strength, the functions of chewing and swallowing become more difficult for people with ALS. People with ALS may also notice that it takes more time and energy to finish eating a meal. They may even be losing weight rapidly. All of these conditions lead to an inability for the body to meet its nutrient needs. It's important to correct this problem in its early stages.

Registered dietitians provide nutritional counseling through diet management to promote good nutrition while preventing malnutrition. They are available to:

- Assess each patient's nutritional needs based upon the progression of their disease.
- Recommend changes in each patient's diet to assist in the treatment of ALS.
- Identify malnutrition.
- Develop individualized care plans for each patient to promote a good nutritional status.
- Provide calorie and protein supplements to increase daily caloric and nutrient consumption.
- Adapt the consistency of foods and liquids when swallowing becomes difficult.
- Recommend other forms of nutrition (such as tube feeding) when patients are not able to obtain adequate nutrition.

Based on the results of a modified barium swallow test, which identifies the source of chewing and swallowing problems, registered dietitians are able to recommend modifications in ALS patients' daily diet. This may mean that the consistency of certain foods may be changed.

Nutritional guidelines

Here's a list of some of the more common nutritional recommendations.

These guidelines assist patients in:

- Maintaining proper nutrition.
- Reducing choking and coughing.
- Making the best use of the swallowing process.

Select foods that require less chewing.

- Choose foods that are soft or blended.
- Choose thick liquids such as nectars or cream soups. Thicken thin liquids such as juice, milk tea, etc. with a thickener. The registered dietitian can recommend a good thickening agent.

Nutritional Supplements

- Drink a nutritional supplement to provide additional calories, protein and other nutrients. The registered dietitian can recommend a good brand to meet your nutritional needs.

Taking Medications

- Crush your pills and mix them with applesauce or pudding.
- Ask your pharmacist for his/her recommendations on which pills should not be crushed.