Medicaid, Nutrition Supplements, and You

Medicaid Coverage for Oral Nutrition Supplements

As of April 1, 2011, New York State Medicaid stopped covering oral nutritional supplements for most individuals. Oral nutritional supplements are products like protein powders, drinks such as Ensure and Boost, and other special foods like puddings that contain calories, protein, and other nutrients for people who need extra nutrition.

Now, Medicaid will only pay for your formula or nutritional supplements if you:
- Require tube feeding because you cannot chew or swallow any foods
- Have inborn errors of metabolism (a condition that prevents proper processing of food or nutrients) or
- Are a child with growth and development problems

The change in coverage for oral nutritional supplements is expected to result in $15 million in savings for New York State. Nutrition professionals and other advocates have been speaking out urging legislators to reinstate oral nutritional supplements for people living with HIV/AIDS who are underweight, malnourished, or at risk for malnutrition. Some even suggest that healthcare costs for complications and hospitalization could increase as a result of the change. Stricter enforcement of coverage criteria could prevent the use of oral nutritional supplements by those who don’t need them which could save money without taking the benefit away from people most in need.

Who Uses Oral Nutrition Supplements?

Oral nutritional supplements are often used by people living with HIV/AIDS who need to prevent or reverse weight loss due to HIV wasting, decreased appetite, or digestive problems such as mouth pain, diarrhea, nausea, and vomiting. Some people have a hard time eating enough because they need to follow special diets for diabetes, kidney disease, or food allergies. Others use oral nutritional supplements if they can’t afford enough food or do not have a place to prepare or store food.

We know that being underweight and poorly nourished is associated with increased risk for HIV related complications and mortality and there is some evidence that among people living with HIV/AIDS, oral nutritional supplements can help increase intake of calories, protein, and nutrients and can help people maintain or gain weight. However, there is little clinical evidence that oral nutrition supplements prevent malnutrition, illness or hospitalization any better than normal foods can. Nevertheless, many people living with HIV/AIDS and their caretakers feel that oral nutritional supplements are an important part of their care and overall health.

What Can I Do If I am Losing Weight?

For people losing coverage and anyone who is worried that they are not eating enough, meeting with a Registered Dietitian can be very helpful.

Your Dietitian can:
- Help you plan meals and snacks that meet your needs so you can gain or maintain your weight
- Teach you how to budget, shop for, and prepare appropriate foods
- Provide you with ways to manage digestive problems to make it easier to eat and digest food and absorb important nutrients
- Teach you how to make homemade alternatives to nutritional supplements like smoothies, shakes, and fortified soups that are easy to prepare and eat

Nutrition for Weight Gain

If you are underweight or are losing weight without trying to, it’s important to communicate with your doctor so that he or she can try to find and treat any underlying medical conditions that could be causing the problem.

It is important to eat enough calories from carbohydrates (rice, bread, pasta, potatoes, oatmeal), fats (olive oil, avocado, peanut butter, cheese), and proteins (chicken, fish, tofu, beans, eggs). Fruits and vegetables like apples, oranges, spinach, broccoli, and tomatoes are also important because they contain vitamins, minerals, and other nutrients.

Here are some tips for eating to gain weight:
- Eat 5-6 small meals throughout the day. They will be easier to stomach than 3 big ones.
- Carry non-perishable food (nuts, fruit, crackers) with you as often as possible, that way you won’t have to skip meals just because you are busy or away from home.
- Try drinking milkshakes, smoothies, or juice or sipping on soup when you’re not feeling hungry. These can provide calories, protein, and fat when you don’t feel like eating. Try some of the included recipes.

Blender Drinks

Blending all ingredients until smooth

Basic Fruit & Yogurt Smoothie
Makes 2 servings
3/4 cup milk
3/4 cup plain or vanilla yogurt
1 cup fresh, frozen, or canned fruit
1 fresh or frozen banana, sliced
2 tablespoons honey (optional)
1 teaspoon vanilla extract (optional)

Dairy-Free Fruit Smoothie
Makes 2 servings
6oz soft or silken tofu
3/4 cup plain or vanilla soy milk
1 cup fresh, frozen, or canned fruit
1 fresh or frozen banana, sliced
2 tablespoons honey (optional)
1 teaspoon vanilla extract (optional)

Peanut Butter Banana Smoothie
Makes 1 serving
1 fresh or frozen banana, sliced
3/4 cup milk or soy milk
2 tablespoons peanut butter
1 tablespoon honey
1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract (optional)
Add-ins: ground oatmeal, ground flax seeds, mashed avocado, kale leaves, parsley leaves, cocoa powder or chocolate syrup

“No Blender” Drinks

Combine all ingredients in a large jar and shake until frothy

No Blender Milk Shake
Makes 2 servings
1 ripe banana, mashed until smooth
1 cup milk
1 cup ice cream, soft but not melted
2 tablespoons chocolate syrup (optional)

Easy Fortified Milk (“Double milk”)
Makes 1 serving
1 cup milk
1/3 cup powdered milk
1 tablespoon chocolate syrup (optional)
**Eat Local This Season**

It’s summertime, and the farmer markets are swarming with shoppers. ’Tis the season to explore your local greenmarket and buy some delicious and nutritious local produce.

**Why Eat Local?**

There are many benefits to eating local. One is that the quality of the food is better than that which you purchase at a supermarket. Because the farmers are bringing the fruits, vegetables, meat or dairy products directly form their farm to the market, there is less travel time involved. This translates to a fresher product. The quality and nutritional value of local food is superior to that which is picked thousands of miles away and transported. Most of the food we buy at the supermarket travels great distances to get there. Also, less travel time means that the food is less susceptible to contamination, so there’s less risk of coming into contact with any bacteria which can cause foodborne illness.

In addition, it is important to support our local farmers. Eating local is good for the local economy, it’s good for the environment, and most importantly, it’s good for you!

**How Local is Local?**

While there is no concrete, formal definition of the distance traveled in order for a food to be considered “local,” a good rule of thumb is 100 miles or so from where you live. The point is, the closer it was produced to you, the better. It’s better to get apples from New Jersey than from Washington State.

**How Can I Eat Local?**

Try visiting a farmers market in your neighborhood. It’s a fun experience: you can shop around, sample some items and get to know the person who grew your food. There are also Community Supported Agriculture programs (known as CSA’s.) When you join a CSA, you prepay for a season’s worth of produce and pick it up on a weekly basis. To learn more about CSA programs in your area, visit http://www.justfood.org/csa. Or if you do not have access to the internet, ask Sarah or Naima for more guidance.

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**Get The Most Out Of Your Food Stamps At The Market**

At the market...

◊ EBT is accepted at most greenmarkets (the map above indicates which markets accept EBT.) At participating markets you can get Health Bucks for every $5 spent in Food Stamps! Health bucks can be used to buy fresh fruits and vegetables.

◊ Don’t buy from the first vendor you see. Bargain shop and don’t be afraid to barter a little.

◊ Ask questions about the foods you might not recognize. Market vendors are a great resource for preparation methods and creative ways to use unfamiliar foods.

◊ Be flexible with your shopping list. You may not find exactly what you’re looking for, but there is probably a great alternative available. Just ask!

◊ Consider tougher cuts of meat. Talk to meat vendors about price ranges and ask them about preparation methods.

At home...

◊ Wash and store your foods immediately after purchasing them. Leafy greens should be washed, dried, and stored in a clean plastic bag with a clean, dry paper towel. Keep fresh fruits in your refrigerator as well.

◊ Freeze what you will not use. Berries, blanched vegetables, and meat will freeze for up to 3 months. Fresh bread lasts for about 3 weeks. Make sure to date all of your frozen foods.

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For more information, visit :www.justfood.org and www.grownyc.org