

## **FAQ Food Systems 5. What instructions can be provided to families and friends who want to provide meals for an Ebola Treatment Unit (ETU) patient?**

In past Ebola outbreaks, some organizations have encouraged and actively promoted provision of meals by family and friends of patients to increase the likelihood that a patient would eat and help maintain a feeling of contact with normal life.<sup>1,2</sup> Familiar foods may indeed provide comfort for patients, if tolerated.

There are, however, challenges to accepting foods brought in from non-ETU sources. It is impossible to ensure whether basic food safety standards have been followed and more difficult to assure that the patient's dietary needs are met.

Each ETU must therefore evaluate the risks and benefits of this practice and decide whether accepting foods provided by family and friends is appropriate in the given context and for the individual patient.

An option may be to only accept food/drinks for certain patients (e.g., those who are not severely ill, have no significant electrolyte imbalances, are tolerating solid foods, and are convalescent) or to not accept meals containing certain 'high-risk' foods (e.g., no meat, no raw vegetables).

When family/friends are permitted to provide meals, a system must be in place to ensure that food hygiene is respected and that the food/drinks provided are in accordance with the patient's dietary needs. The system must include means for proper communication with staff and family/friends regarding the requirements, and steps to be taken from the moment food/drink is received until it reaches the patient's bedside.

Families/friends should receive guidance and instructions regarding:

- What type of diet to provide – including explanation of solid, semi-solid, or liquid diet.
- What types of foods to provide – noting the need for energy-dense, highly digestible foods, and any other specific dietary requirements the patient may have.
- Basic food hygiene practices to be followed during preparation (see FAQ FS3).
- How to package individual meals (see FAQ FS4).

**NOTE:** ETU staff must not accept packages of food with any visible bodily fluids on them and must perform hand hygiene before and after handling any food packages from outside the ETU.

**Annex 1. Suggestions for families/friends wishing to provide meals for an ETU patient<sup>3</sup>**

**TYPE OF MEAL:**

- Solid diet** (for patients with good appetite and no difficulty with eating) – standard food provided; large solid pieces may need to be cut into small pieces if the patient is too weak to cut.
- Semi-solid diet** (for patients with moderate appetite and/or difficulty with eating) – food must be soft and easy to swallow without chewing; standard food can often be used, though some items may need to be pureed
- Liquid diet** (for patients with poor appetite and extreme difficulty eating) – food must be drinkable.

**SUGGESTIONS FOR WHAT TO BRING (ADAPT ACCORDING TO TYPE OF MEAL)**

- Fresh coconut water**



- Family meal or soup with foods from the following categories:**

- Starchy foods (rice, millet, potatoes, cassava, yam tubers, sweet potatoes, etc.)



- Vegetables (zucchini, eggplant, carrots, green leaves, pumpkin, etc.)



- Protein of vegetable (dry beans, peas, lentils – soaked overnight and well cooked) or animal-source foods (eggs, fish, poultry, meat) with no bones.



- Porridge** from rice, maize, millet or other mixed with sugar, milk or vegetables.



Note: Family meals and porridges can be enriched with 1 tablespoon of oil if not used for preparation.

- Snacks** (bananas/plantains, avocado, mango, baobab fruit, dry dates and figs, nuts, etc.)



## References

1. Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF). *2018 Filovirus Disease Guidelines - Draft, Appendix X: Nutritional Tools for Patients Infected with Filovirus Disease.*; 2018.
2. World Health Organization. *Optimized Supportive Care for Ebola Virus Disease: Clinical Management Standard Operating Procedures.* World Health Organization; 2019.
3. International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF OCB/OCG). *Nutritional Protocol for Patients Infected with Ebola Virus Disease.* v 3.; 2016.

