

Eating well during treatment



Page 1 of 1

People with cancer can have difficulty eating.

- Some people don't feel like eating when they have cancer treatment.
- It is common for people to lose weight when they have cancer or cancer treatment
- People can feel sick because of cancer or cancer treatment.
- With some cancers, people need to eat a special diet.

If you don't feel like eating

People can lose their appetite because of illness, treatment, tiredness, taste changes, pain, depression, nausea or vomiting. Some people don't feel like eating the same way they used to.

These might help:

- Eat small meals and snacks often.
- Eat moist food if you have a sore mouth. Fruit and vegetable juices can be good.
- Lemon juice and salt can give flavour when food tastes bland.
- Try sipping clear liquids, such as clear soup, and then having biscuits or something 'light'.
- Eat more of your favourite foods.
- If you have a sore mouth, tell your doctor or nurse. The soreness may be treated. Drinking through a straw may help.

Ways to put on weight

Some people lose weight because of their cancer or treatment. Adding energy and protein to your diet can help.

- Eat cheese, full-cream milk and other dairy products if you are able to.
- If you cannot eat a meal, try a nourishing drink instead. Add an egg, icecream or fruit to a drink. You can also have these between meals to help put on some weight.
- Food supplements can add extra energy and/or

protein to your diet. You can buy them from your chemist or supermarket. For some, you need a prescription from your doctor. Ask your doctor before using dietary supplements. This is especially important if you are diabetic.

If you feel sick

Nausea (feeling sick) is common with cancer and cancer treatment.

- If the smell of cooking makes you feel sick, eat cold meals or salads.
- Try eating prepared food that just needs to be heated. Remember to defrost frozen food before cooking, and make sure it is cooked.
- If you live with someone who can cook, let them do the cooking!
- Avoid greasy, fatty or fried foods. These can have a strong smell and make people feel sick.
- Try eating some dry food, such as toast, when you wake up. This can settle your stomach.
- Eat light foods like thin soups or egg custards. Gradually introduce small amounts of your favourite foods.
- Sip fizzy drink like mineral water, ginger ale, lemonade or soda water.
- Have drinks between meals rather than with your food.
- Ask your doctor to prescribe you some anti-sickness tablets (anti-emetics).

Planning a special diet

Some people with cancer have special eating problems. For example, people with a colostomy or ileostomy or laryngectomy need to follow a special diet. Diabetics and people with heart or cholesterol problems will need to seek special advice. Doctors and dietitians can help.

Most hospitals have dietitians who specialise in nutrition for people with cancer. If you feel you need help with your diet ask for a referral to see a dietitian.

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