

Eating Well During Cancer Treatment

Eating well is important when you are being treated for cancer. Good nutrition helps you feel better, raises your energy level, and can help lower the side effects from your cancer treatment.

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Getting enough liquid is an important part of good nutrition. Try to get at least 64 ounces (8 cups) of liquids without caffeine each day unless your cancer care team gives other directions. These things can count as part of the 64 ounces:

- Juice
- Soup
- Milk
- Sports drinks
- Popsicles
- Other drinks

Managing Side Effects

Some cancer treatments can make it hard to eat. You may have nausea. Foods may taste different. Your mouth and throat may be sore. You may feel too tired to make meals. Here are some tips that can help.

Nausea and Vomiting

- Have several small meals each day. Set timer for every 2-3 hours. Eat slowly.
- Relax after meals to help food digest, but do not lie down. Loosen your clothes. Breathing fresh air can help ease nausea.
- Avoid or limit foods with strong odors. Limit fried or spicy foods.
- Eat foods cold or at room temperature.
- When you have nausea, eat dry, bland foods such as crackers or toast.
- Do not eat your favorite foods when you have nausea. Eat them when you feel well.

Taste Changes

- Brushing your teeth or rinsing your mouth before eating may help.
- Use different seasonings, herbs, and spices.
 - Try adding basil, onion, garlic, and other flavors.
 - Try different flavors such as sour, bitter, tart, or sweet to see what tastes best. Try adding vinegar, lemon, lime, and orange to meals.
- Some foods may taste bitter or like metal. Sugarfree lemon drops, gum, or mints may help.
- If food tastes like metal, try using plastic or wood utensils.
- See the factsheet *Taste Changes during Cancer Treatment* for more ideas.

Sore Mouth or Throat

- Drink plenty of liquids. If your mouth is sore, use a straw.
- Choose soft, moist foods. Add extra gravies, cream sauces, or butter to meals. Cook food until it is soft and tender.
- Eat cold foods to help soothe your mouth and throat.
- Avoid citrus fruits and juices, spicy or salty foods, and rough, coarse, or dry foods.
- Rinse your mouth often. Ask your dentist about gentle cleaning products for your teeth and gums.

Fatigue

- When you have the energy, make and freeze meals to eat later.
- Let friends or family members cook for you.
- Keep snack foods on hand.
- Use plates and dishes you can throw away to save clean-up time.
- Make sure to keep hydrated and drink adequate fluids to help prevent dehydration which can lead to more fatigue.

Constipation

- Eat plenty of high-fiber foods such as whole grains, fruits, and vegetables.
- Eat at least five servings of fruits and vegetables every day.
- Add fiber to your diet slowly over 8 weeks with a goal of eating 25-38 grams of fiber each day.
- Drink plenty of liquids. Prune juice may help.
- Take walks and do light exercise often. *Check with your doctor before starting any exercise program.
- Ask your cancer care team before you take any stool softeners or laxatives.

Diarrhea

- Eat less high-fiber food such as whole grains, fruits, and raw vegetables.
- Eat several small meals each day.
Eating certain foods can help:
 - Applesauce
 - Potatoes
 - Bananas
 - Rice
 - Pasta
 - Toast
- Limit foods that can give you gas such as gassy vegetables, greasy, fried, or spicy foods.
- Drink plenty of liquids between meals.
- Try eating less milk and milk products such as ice cream, cheese, and yogurt.
- Ask your cancer care team if a soluble fiber supplement such as Metamucil® would help.

Weight Loss

- Try to eat four to six small meals each day. Set an alarm for every 2-3 hours.
- Plan ahead and keep snacks in your car, purse, or backpack.
- Eat slowly and take breaks during meals.
- If you get full too fast at meals, don't drink at mealtime. Drink liquids between meals instead.
- When you have a good appetite, make the most of it. Appetite is often best in the morning, so try to eat more at breakfast.

- Add protein to your diet with foods such as cheese, yogurt, milk, cottage cheese, nuts, seeds, peanut butter, meats, and beans.
- Put extra calories in food you already eat by adding one or more of these:
 - Butter or margarine
 - Mayonnaise
 - Honey
 - Peanut butter
 - Creamer
 - Powdered milk
- Be creative. Try making milkshakes or smoothies packed with protein and calories. See the factsheet *High-Calorie, High Protein Recipes* for ideas.
- Use a supplement such as Carnation Breakfast Essentials, Boost, or Ensure.

Call your cancer care team or Registered Dietitian if these tips do not help your nausea, constipation, diarrhea, or weight loss.

For More Information

Patient Education Resources

hci-portal.hci.utah.edu/sites/factsheets

Click on the Food and Nutrition icon to find the factsheet *High-Calorie, High-Protein Recipes*. The National Cancer Institute booklet "Eating Hints" is also here.

Linda B. and Robert B. Wiggins Wellness and Integrative Health Center

801-587-4585

The Wellness Center offers free counseling with registered dietitians for patients with all types of cancer. Call for more information or to make an appointment.

G. Mitchell Morris Cancer Learning Center

Visit the 6th floor of the cancer hospital

Call 1-888-424-2100

Email cancerinfo@hci.utah.edu

Text 801-528-1112 (text only)

The Cancer Learning Center has free cancer resources in their lending library and cancer information specialists who can help find what you want to know.