

Nutrition During Cancer Treatment

Benefits of good nutrition during cancer treatment

Maintaining good nutrition is important in providing sufficient energy and nutrients for your body to stay strong during your battle against cancer.¹ Your care team can work with you to identify nutrition goals and plan ways to help you achieve them.²



Common chemotherapy side effects impacting nutrition ^{3,4}	Managing side effects with dietary changes ^{*3,4}
Appetite loss – general lack of desire to eat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eat small meals and nutritious snacks throughout the day • Drink a liquid or powdered meal replacement when it is hard to eat
Loss of taste – can make food unappealing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add spices and herbs to enhance flavor • Marinate meats and other protein sources
Nausea and vomiting – might reduce your appetite and cause weight loss	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Try ginger products, such as ginger ale or tea • Eat dry foods like toast, pretzels or crackers
Diarrhea – may drain your body of nutrients	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drink hydrating fluids with electrolytes, like coconut water or sports drinks • Eat probiotics from foods such as yogurt or kefir
Constipation – can cause discomfort and further reduce your desire to eat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drink enough fluids, including hot beverages • Ask your doctor if high-fiber foods or a mild laxative is appropriate for you
Chewing and swallowing – you may have problems opening or closing your mouth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eat soft foods, such as eggs or oatmeal • Drink high-calorie smoothies, milkshakes or nutritional supplements
Mouth sores and mouth pain – swelling inside the mouth and throat may make eating uncomfortable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eat soothing foods that are cold, soft and mild • Avoid acidic, spicy and hard foods • Drink through a straw to avoid sore spots

*The dietary changes listed in the table do not represent a comprehensive list. Work with your cancer care team to identify strategies specific to your situation.

Eating well may help you:^{1,3}

- Feel better
- Keep up your strength and energy
- Heal and recover faster
- Maintain your weight and your body's store of nutrients
- Maintain muscle mass
- Lower your risk of infection
- Better tolerate treatment-related side effects

A healthy diet helps your body function at its best, and protects and preserves body tissue.¹ This is even more important if you have cancer.¹ It's important to maintain your strength, your energy level, and your immune system when preparing to undergo treatment.¹

Food Safety^{3,4}

Some treatments may weaken the immune system, which can raise the risk of an infection. Some basic food safety tips to reduce the risk of infection:

- Wash your hands before you handle and prepare food
- Rinse vegetables and fruit thoroughly before eating them
- Keep hot foods above 140°F and cold foods below 40°F
- Eat fully cooked foods. For example, avoid runny, half-cooked eggs as well as raw fish, oysters and shellfish
- Refrigerate food right after eating
- Avoid unpasteurized foods
- Thaw food in the refrigerator and not on the counter

Snack Time¹

During cancer treatment your body often needs extra calories and protein to help you maintain your weight and heal as quickly as possible. If you're losing weight, snacks can help you meet those needs, keep up your strength and energy level, and help you feel better.

Some tips that may help improve nutritional intake:³⁻⁵

- Eat when you are most hungry. Find out which time of day is best for a bigger meal
- Have prepared foods ready to go in case you get hungry and can't or don't want to cook
- Make every bite count more. Eat foods high in calorie and protein content:
 - High-protein foods include meat, fish, eggs, dairy products and legumes
 - High-calorie foods include cheese, peanut butter, and high-quality oats
- Eat 5-6 smaller meals throughout the day
- Stay physically active

It's important to discuss your diet and eating habits with your care team on an ongoing basis to ensure you have the tools you need to recover from treatment and build up your immunity.⁶



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References:

1. Eating well during treatment. American Cancer Society. <https://www.cancer.org/treatment/survivorship-during-and-after-treatment/coping/nutrition/once-treatment-starts.html>. Accessed April 6, 2022. 2. PDQ® Supportive and Palliative Care Editorial Board. PDQ Nutrition in Cancer Care. Bethesda, MD: National Cancer Institute. Updated 05/24/2022. Available at: <https://www.cancer.gov/about-cancer/treatment/side-effects/appetite-loss/nutrition-pdq>. Accessed 06/07/2022. 3. Support for people with cancer eating hints. National Cancer Institute. <https://www.cancer.gov/publications/patient-education/eatinghints.pdf>. Accessed June 7, 2022. 4. Eating well during cancer treatment. Cancer Support Community. https://www.cancersupportcommunity.org/sites/default/files/fsac/Eating_Well_During_Cancer_Treatment.pdf. Accessed June 7, 2022. 5. Nutrition recommendations during and after treatment. Cancer.Net. <https://www.cancer.net/survivorship/healthy-living/nutrition-recommendations-during-and-after-treatment>. Published May 15, 2020. Accessed June 7, 2022. 6. Dixon CS, Klemm and S. Chemotherapy and Diet. EatRight. <https://www.eatright.org/health/diseases-and-conditions/cancer/chemotherapy-and-diet>. Accessed June 7, 2022.