

Physical Concerns – *Weight Loss or Lack of Appetite*

Internet version of this handout with active resource links at: <http://cancer-help.me/weightloss>

Cancer treatments can cause multiple different side effects including nausea, vomiting, decreased appetite, diarrhea, constipation, and changes in the way you taste or smell food. These changes may affect your body weight. What you need in your diet can also change. You may need more calories and protein and more or less fiber. Once treatment ends, many of these changes subside. However it is important that during treatment you get the best nutrition. Healthy eating can boost your immune system, repair damaged tissue, and help you get through treatment.

Relieving side effects is an important part of cancer care and treatment. This is called symptom management or palliative care. Talk with your health care team about any symptoms you experience and any change in symptoms.

Tips for getting the most from your meals

When you have decreased appetite, large meals can seem overwhelming or unappealing. This can happen when you have a decreased appetite. The suggestions below can help you get enough calories:

- Eat small meals 6 to 8 times a day instead of 3 main meals.
- Drink beverages high in calories such as hot chocolate, fruit juices, milkshakes and nectars.
- Eat your favorite foods and snacks at any time of the day. For example, eat breakfast foods such as pancakes or omelets for lunch or dinner.
- Include different colors and textures of foods in your meals to make them more appealing.
- Make dining a good experience by eating your meals in a pleasant, relaxing setting with family or friends.

Tips for adding more protein to your diet

If you recently had surgery or have wounds, eating more protein will help you heal. The suggestions below will help you increase the amount of protein in your diet:

- Eat foods rich in protein, such as chicken, fish, pork, beef, lamb, eggs, milk, cheese, beans, nuts and tofu.
- Use Double Milk or Ensure®-type supplements in hot or cold cereals.
- Add cheese and diced, cooked meats to your omelets.
- Add powdered milk to creamy soups, mashed potatoes, milkshakes, and casseroles.

- Snack on cheese, nuts or nut butters (peanut, cashew, and almond butter) with crackers or eat with apples, bananas, or celery.
- Blend a nut butter into your chocolate or vanilla shakes.
- Snack on roasted nuts and sunflower, pumpkin, or chia seeds, hummus with pita bread.
- Add cooked meats and beans to soups, casseroles, salads, and omelets.
- Add wheat germ or ground flax seeds to cereals, casseroles, yogurt, and meat spreads.

Tips for adding more calories to your diet

- While you're healing, it's more important that you get enough calories.
- Don't eat foods that are fat-free or reduced in fat. Avoid food and drink labels that say "low-fat," "non-fat," or "diet." Use whole milk instead of skim.
- Snack on dried fruits, nuts, or dried seeds. Add them to hot cereals, ice cream, or salads.
- Add butter, margarine, or oils to potatoes, rice, and pasta. Also add them to cooked vegetables, sandwiches, toast, and hot cereals.
- Add cream cheese to toast or bagels or use it as a spread on vegetables. Spread cream cheese and jam or peanut butter and jelly on crackers, add jelly or honey to breads and crackers.
- Mix jam with diced fruit, use as a topping for ice cream or cake.
- Snack on tortilla chips with guacamole. Add avocado to salads.
- Use high-calorie dressings on salads, baked potatoes, and on chilled cooked vegetables, such as green beans or asparagus.
- Add sour cream, half and half, or heavy cream to mashed potatoes and cake and cookie recipes. You can also add it to pancake batter, sauces, gravies, soups, and casseroles.
- Top cakes, waffles, French toast, fruits, puddings, and hot chocolate with whipped cream.
- Make vegetables or pasta with cream sauces.
- Use mayonnaise, creamy salad dressing, or aioli sauce in salads, sandwiches, and vegetable dips.
- Mix granola with yogurt or put it on top of ice cream or fruits.
- Drink high-calorie, high-protein drinks, such as Carnation Breakfast Essentials® or Ensure®

Adapted from: https://www.nccn.org/patients/resources/life_with_cancer/managing_symptoms/impact_on_diet.aspx

Resources for Additional Information:

- [NCCN, Information on Diet and Weight Changes](#)
- [American Cancer Society, Appetite Changes](#)
- [American Cancer Society, Weight Changes](#)
- [Cancer.Net, Appetite Loss Handout](#)
- [Cancer.Net, Weight Loss](#)
- [NIH, Nutrition in Cancer Care \(PDQ®\)](#)
- [ASCO Answers Fact Sheet, Appetite Loss](#)
- [Chemocare, Weight Changes](#)
- [Memorial Sloan Kettering Eating Well During and After Your Cancer Treatment](#)
- [CancerCare.org, Coping With Cancer-Related Weight Changes and Muscle Loss](#)

Food Resources

- [Greater Chicago Food Depository](#) (773) 247-3663
- [Illinois Department of Human Services, Cash, SNAP & Medical Assistance](#) (800) 843-6154
- [City of Chicago, Community Service Center Location](#)

Información Española

- [American Cancer Society, Cambios en el apetito](#)
- [Cancer.Net, Pérdida de peso](#)
- [Chemocare, Cambios de peso](#)