

Managing Weight Loss after Cancer Treatment



UHN

Information for cancer survivors

Read this pamphlet to learn about:

- What causes weight loss
- What you can do to gain back some weight
- How to talk to your doctor
- Where to get more information

Please visit the UHN Patient Education website for more health information: www.uhnpatienteducation.ca
© 2013 University Health Network. All rights reserved.
This information is to be used for informational purposes only and is not intended as a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Please consult your health care provider for advice about a specific medical condition. A single copy of these materials may be reprinted for non-commercial personal use only.

Author: Dr. Doris Howell, Christy Brissette and ELLICSR Research Team
Created: 06/2013
Form: D-3384

Many people with cancer can have weight changes following the diagnosis and treatment of cancer.

This usually depends on the type of cancer and treatment.

If you have a healthy weight you can:

- have more energy
- feel better
- enjoy your life better

What causes weight loss?

Cancer itself can cause you to lose weight.	
Cause of weight loss	What to expect
Cancer itself	Cancer can change the way the body uses protein and calories as it works to fight the cancer. This sometimes leads to weight loss.

continued on next page→

Cancer treatments can cause you to lose weight.

Cause of weight loss	What to expect
Cancer treatments	<p>Cancer treatments can affect how much you want to eat.</p> <p>If you have the side effects below because of your cancer treatments, you may eat less and lose weight:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• nausea• vomiting• mouth sores• trouble swallowing• taste changes <p>Other side effects from cancer treatment may include pain, depression and fatigue.</p> <p>These can also make you want to eat less and lose weight.</p> <p>These side effects can last a short time and get better. Sometimes they last long after treatment is finished.</p>

If you have finished your treatment and are still losing weight, tell a member of your healthcare team. You can also talk to a registered dietitian for tips on how to keep a healthy weight.

What can I do?

Here are 6 tips to help you gain some weight:



1. Eat healthy

Add extra protein to your food. Examples:

- peanut butter
- cheese
- eggs
- skim milk powder

Eat food that has many proteins and little unhealthy fat. Examples:

- fish
- poultry
- lean meats
- eggs
- nuts
- seeds
- legumes

Eat 5 or more servings of fruits and vegetables every day.

Eat food of different colours.

Eat healthy fats (also called monounsaturated fatty acids or omega-3 fatty acids).

Examples:

- olive oil
- avocado
- nuts and seeds
- fatty fish
- flax seeds
- walnuts

Avoid unhealthy fats (also called saturated or trans fats)

Examples:

- butter
- pastries
- some packaged foods

Taking vitamins and eating healthy might be beneficial to a healthy lifestyle.

**Talk to your doctor before you start taking any vitamins
as part of your daily routine.**



2. Eat more calories

Add healthy fats to your meals to add extra calories without having to eat more food.

Examples:

- Add oil, soft margarine, cheese, mayonnaise, gravy, salad dressing or other sauces.

Avoid diet and low fat food.

Example:

- Switch from skim milk to 2%

Set goals that increase the amount of food you eat.

Example:

- Eat 500 calories more a day to gain about 1 pound each week.

If you get full quickly at meals, eat the food with the most calories first.

Example:

- Protein foods (such as meat, chicken, and fish), then starches (such as potatoes, pasta). Eat your vegetables last.

Drink high calorie beverages.

Examples:

- juices
- fruit nectars
- 2% milk
- malted milk
- smoothies
- Ovaltine
- Carnation Instant Breakfast
- commercial nutritional shakes beverages such as Ensure and Boost

Choose soups that have more calories.

Examples:

- Hearty or creamy soups instead of broth based soups



3. Eat small meals often

If you are not hungry, eat smaller meals more often during the day. Instead of eating 3 big meals, eat 5 or 6 smaller meals

Drink milkshakes, smoothies, and purees. These are easier to digest. Add milk or protein powder to your food.

Always carry snacks with you.

At meal-time, eat a few bites even if you are not hungry.



4. Try new foods

Sometimes you may not want to eat your favorite foods. That's ok!

- Try different foods and drinks
- Even if you did not like some foods before, you may like them on another day
- Go to a buffet and sample different foods.



5. Eat when you are most hungry

It may be easier to make a meal of the day your main meal.

For example:

- Make breakfast or lunch your “main” meal of the day)

Plan your meal for when you are most hungry or when you can eat the most.



6. Drink a lot of liquids

Drink a lot of water!

You can also get liquids from soup, popsicles, sports drinks, and even pedialyte.

Drink most of your liquids in between meals.

Avoid drinking a lot of liquids when you eat. This may make you feel full faster.

ELLICSR Kitchen offers 2 classes on eating healthy.

1. From Plant to Plate is run by a chef and dietician who are joined by guests from local farms, restaurants, and other health and food focused organizations. Here you will learn how food is grown, and how to prepare your food.
2. The Survivor's Kitchen: Cooking for Health class is run by a chef and dietician who provide advice and great recipes to keep you eating healthy.

For more information about these classes and recipes visit ELLICSRkitchen.ca

How do I talk to my doctor?

Talk to your doctor about what a healthy weight is for you. Ask your doctor how to reach the weight that is best for you. You and your doctor can work together to control some side effects of cancer that make you lose weight.

Where can I get more information?

BC Cancer Agency

Website: www.bccancer.bc.ca/PPI/copingwithcancer/symptoms/eatingchallenges/appetiteloss/default.htm

Canadian Cancer Society

Website: www.cancer.ca/Canadawide/About%20cancer/Coping%20with%20cancer/Nutrition/Protein.aspx?sc_lang=en

CancerCare

Website: www.cancercare.org

Mayo Clinic

Website: www.mayoclinic.com/health/cancer-survivor/CA00070

OncoLink

Website: www.oncolink.org/coping/coping.cfm?c=3

Cancer.Net

Website: www.cancer.net/all-about-cancer/treating-cancer/managing-side-effects/weight-loss

National Cancer Institute

Website: www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/coping/life-after-treatment/page4

Continuum Cancer Centres

Website: http://cancer.wehealny.org/symptoms/1_1_7.html

Remember:

- ✓ Try to make every mouthful count
- ✓ Snack often throughout the day
- ✓ Keep ready-to-eat foods available for times when you don't feel like cooking
- ✓ Eat more during the time of day when you are hungriest
- ✓ Be creative with your meals – have breakfast for dinner or dinner for breakfast