



What to Eat When You Don't Feel Like Eating

Princess Margaret

For patients who have loss of appetite due to cancer and its treatment



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Good nutrition is important for everyone. It is especially important when you are not feeling well. Eating well during treatments (like chemotherapy and radiation) can be challenging, but it can help you maintain your strength, energy and sense of well-being. A variety of side effects can affect your ability to eat.

Poor appetite is a common complaint among people with cancer. It may be due to a number of factors such as pain, depression, taste changes, fatigue, side effects of treatments, as well as the disease itself. Some people may require more nutrients during treatment. This, paired with a poor appetite, can lead to weight loss.

During treatment, the focus shifts from disease prevention to getting through the treatment period. The goal is to get enough **calories, protein** and **fluids** in your diet. Food choices may vary based on your situation and your personal needs. Listed below are general tips to help get you started.

Calories

Calories provide your body with energy to help it function properly. When you are losing weight and have no appetite, the easiest way to increase calories is to use extra fats (like oils and butter) and carbohydrates (like dried fruits, honey and jam). What might limit your choices is if you are trying to manage a side effect or if you are following a special diet for other conditions. For instance, if you have diabetes, it is not a good idea to eat high sugar foods. If this applies to you, please talk to your dietitian about what to do.

Here are some simple ways to make your foods more calorie rich.

Add:

- Butter or margarine to noodles, rice and breads
- Gravy or sauces to mashed potatoes and meats
- Salad dressing or oils when cooking
- Creams, honey or jams to fruits, yogurts and desserts

You can also take in more calories without increasing the amount of food you are eating by switching what you are using:

Switch from	To
Skim milk	2% milk
Tea or coffee	Hot chocolate made with milk
Broth soup	Cream soup
Water	Juices

Protein

People with cancer often need more protein in their diets to help the body heal and the immune system perform. To increase the protein in your diet, try adding some of the following foods into your daily recipes:

- Cheese
- Nuts and seeds
- Peanut butter
- Eggs
- Dried peas and beans like chick peas or lentils
- Tofu
- Skim milk powder
- Meat, fish and poultry

Fluids

Getting adequate fluids in your diet is important to maintain hydration. Aim for 8 glasses of fluids each day. Fluids don't just refer to water. Consider using high nutrient drinks such as milk and milkshakes to help meet your protein and calorie needs. Jell-O™, popsicles, ice cream and soups can add fluids to your diet as well. Drinking nutrition supplements such as Ensure™ and Boost™ between meals can also add fluids and calories to your diet. Dilute them with milk or ice if they are too sweet.

Quick Tips

- Snack often throughout the day
- Keep ready-to-eat foods available for times when you don't feel like cooking
(for example: frozen meals, cheese and crackers, cookies, soups, yogurt)
- Eat more during the time of day when you are hungriest
- Be creative with your meals – have breakfast for dinner or dinner for breakfast!

Try to make every mouthful count and remember that small changes can go a long way!

Ask your doctor or nurse for a referral to get more advice from a dietitian.

Helpful Resources at the Princess Margaret Patient & Family Library

- “Goes Down Easy: Recipes to help you cope with the challenges of eating during cancer treatment cookbook”
- “Increasing Calories and Protein in Your Diet” pamphlet
- “What to Eat When You Don’t Feel Like Eating” class



Attend a class in your preferred language. You can book a medical interpreter for this class at no cost to you. To book, please call 416-581-8604. Five weekdays advance notice is needed.

To search online for these and other helpful resources, go to www.theprincessmargaret.ca:

- Click on “Patients and Families” on the blue menu bar
- Scroll down and click on “Search the Library”

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