

Nutrition During Your Cancer Treatment

When you are being treated for cancer, nutrition is an important part of your care. Even if you are eating less than usual, regular meals can help you feel stronger and give you more energy. Use the tips in this handout and talk to your registered dietitian nutritionist (RDN) about other ways that you can feel better.

Eating Tips During Cancer Treatment

- **Eat small, frequent meals.** Aim to eat something every 2-3 hours, even if you don't feel hungry, and avoid skipping meals. This will help to prevent nausea and ensure that you are eating enough to maintain your weight. It may become difficult for you to eat larger meals due to side effects of the treatment, so smaller portions will be easier to tolerate.
- **Focus on adding a protein source to each meal and snack.** These include chicken, fish, meat, beans, lentils, peas, tofu/tempeh/seitan, milk, yogurt, cheese, eggs, seeds, and nuts/nut butter.
- **Eat "by the clock" instead of waiting for your stomach to tell you to eat to avoid skipping meals.** Set an alarm on your phone or post a meal/snack checklist on your refrigerator to remind you to eat. The treatment can make you feel less hungry, so you can't always trust your stomach to tell you when it's time to eat.
- **Stay hydrated! Aim to drink at least 8-10 8oz glasses of fluid/day.** If you do not like the taste of plain water, you can try flavored waters, iced or hot tea, soda water, Gatorade, Pedialyte, broth, or diluted juices.
- **Aim for 30 minutes of exercise per day.** Try to walk, climb some stairs, do some yoga, etc. to help prevent muscle loss and fight fatigue.
- **Try a baking soda and saltwater rinse** to swish, gargle, and spit before and after meals to cleanse your palate. Combine ¼ tsp baking soda with ¼ tsp salt in 8 oz of water.

General Food Safety Tips

- Wash hands for 20 seconds with warm, soapy water before meal prep and eating.
- Wash raw fruits and vegetables for 30 seconds under cold, running water.
- Wash hands, countertops, cutting boards, knives well, especially after contact with raw beef, chicken, fish, etc.
- Avoid raw animal foods such as raw fish or sushi, undercooked or rare meats, unpasteurized dairy, raw nuts, and raw vegetable sprouts.
- Leftovers should be reheated thoroughly and eaten within 3 days.

Helpful Hints for Managing Symptoms

<p>Nausea</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eat small, frequent meals throughout the day. • Eat bland foods that are higher in protein like milk, yogurt, smooth peanut butter, etc. • Try dry, starchy foods like crackers or toast. • Avoid foods with strong smells. • Eat foods cold or at room temperature. • Always keep something in your stomach if nausea occurs between meals.
<p>Diarrhea</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eat bland, low-fiber foods such as chicken without the skin, fish, eggs, Greek yogurt, smooth peanut butter, etc. • Avoid fried, greasy, and spicy foods. • Limit high fiber foods such as whole grains, raw vegetables, fruits with peels and leafy greens. • Consider drinks with electrolytes to help replenish lost nutrients. Limit sugar-sweetened beverages. • Eat high-potassium foods, such as bananas and potatoes and binding foods such as rice, potatoes, and applesauce. • Drink an additional cup of fluid after every episode of diarrhea.
<p>Constipation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you are prescribed medications for constipation, take as directed by your care team to help stay ahead of constipation symptoms. • Drink adequate fluids to help maintain hydration as this can improve constipation symptoms. • Try warm or hot beverages and foods, such as tea, warmed prune juice and hot cereals to help produce a bowel movement.
<p>Taste and Smell Changes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Before eating, rinse your mouth with a solution of 1 quart of water mixed with 3/4 teaspoon of salt and 1 teaspoon of baking soda. • Muted or lost taste: Increase use of herbs, spices, tangy marinades, citrus and hot sauces to enhance flavors. • If you experience a metallic taste: Try sweeter flavors and use wooden or plastic utensils. • If smells bother you, try eating colder foods such as sandwich, smoothies, cheese, and yogurt.