

Living With and Beyond Cancer Information Sheet

32. Preparing meals & drinks

Fatigue and other side-effects of treatment such as nausea can make preparing meals and drinks difficult. However it is very important that you continue to eat well and drink plenty of fluids as under-nutrition can make these problems worse and impact on your treatment and its outcomes.

How can I manage this?

- Eating small regular meals and snacks is often more manageable than 3 large meals per day, so ignore the rules and eat what you want when you feel at your best.
- Convenience foods such as frozen meals, tinned foods and ready meals are also good for when you want something quick and easy to prepare. These foods can be purchased when you are feeling well and kept for the days you don't feel so good. You can also make the most of your good days by planning ahead and cooking your favourite foods for freezing and use later on. Alternatively you could also try a meal delivery company (see below for further information).

Note: Remember to defrost frozen foods thoroughly and cook all foods properly to avoid any risk of food poisoning. This is also a good opportunity to give family and friends the chance to help by doing some shopping or cooking for you.

- If you really can't face eating, try a nourishing drink. You can make a smoothie by blending bananas, peaches, strawberries or other soft fruit (fresh or frozen) with milk, fruit juice, ice cream or yoghurt. Alternatively you could try drinks such as milk, ready made smoothies, fruit juice, cocoa, Horlicks, and Ovaltine as they are often more nutritious than water, low calorie drinks, tea and coffee. Some high calorie, fortified drinks and soups are also available via supermarkets and pharmacies e.g. Complan and Build-Up.
- If problems with eating and/or drinking persist and it is impacting upon your weight, mood or energy levels your GP/ District Nurse and if having treatment or seeing an oncologist the Dietetic department can support you in identifying ways of preparing and accessing nutritious meals and they may also consider nutritional supplements.

Eating well is an important factor in maintaining good health. If you have difficulty preparing or cooking meals and you do not have a friend, relative or neighbour available to help, here are some suggestions you may like to consider:

Private local suppliers – specialist suppliers of frozen ready meals have a wide choice of menus and will deliver direct to your home see below. Many supermarkets and shops stock a good selection of frozen meals, and some cafes, pubs, restaurants and care homes offer meals which they may be able to deliver to your home.

Lunch Clubs – if you would like to meet other people at a lunch club or social club we can tell you about clubs near to where you live.

Home Cooking – you may choose to employ someone such as a home care assistant, either to help you do your own cooking or to do it for you. If you are recovering from an illness, bereavement or a stay in hospital there may be a re-ablement service in your area which could help you regain your confidence to start cooking again.

Frozen Meal Delivery Service

- Some companies offer a frozen meal delivery service, each week you choose the meals you would like place your order and when they are delivered you pay the delivery person with either cash or cheque.
- Place the meals in the freezer until they are ready to be cooked either in conventional oven or microwave
- Some people may be eligible for help towards the cost of this service, speak to local authority social work services for eligibility criteria.

32. Preparing meals & drinks

Many people had a healthy lifestyle before their cancer diagnosis and treatment. Sometimes it can be a challenge to maintain this as people don't usually expect to gain weight during cancer treatment. Some treatments, side effects or even lifestyle changes can cause you to put on weight: treatments – some chemotherapy drugs, steroids and hormonal therapies can cause weight gain.

Tiredness due to the cancer or treatment – this can make you less physically active than usual, which may cause you to gain weight.

- Depression – for some people, natural feelings of sadness or worry about the cancer can develop into depression. Eating more and gaining weight may be symptoms of this.
- Stopping smoking – this is the healthiest decision anyone who smokes can make. It can cause weight gain at first but you will be much healthier after quitting though, and you can gradually lose the extra weight.
- Comfort eating – some people turn to food for comfort when life is stressful, which can lead to weight gain.
- People close to us may offer food as a way of showing that they care and want to be helpful; it can be difficult to refuse such a kind offer.
- Don't be too hard on yourself if you find you've put on weight. Sometimes, knowing why it's happened can help you think of ways to manage it.
- After treatment, most people need time to recover. But as you gradually get better, you may find that you're ready to make some changes.
- If you think you've gained weight because you're depressed, talk to your GP or nurse. There are effective treatments for depression, such as counselling and antidepressants.
- If you're having hormonal therapy as part of your treatment, it's very important not to stop taking this, even if you think it's causing weight gain. Talk to your cancer doctor or nurse if you're concerned about this. Eating healthily and being more physically active will help you manage your weight.

Talk to your doctor and nurse

Before trying to lose weight, it's important to speak to your GP, cancer doctor or nurse. They can talk to you about the right approach for you, based on the cancer you have and its treatment.

They'll also take into account your weight before diagnosis and any other medical conditions you may have.

Your doctor or nurse will measure your body mass (BMI) and blood pressure, and may take a blood test. However remember the BMI does not take into the account muscle mass.

They might also suggest you see other health professionals for advice, such as a dietician, physiotherapist or specialist nurse. They can also give you information about where you can get help and support locally.

Living With and Beyond Cancer Information Sheet

32. Preparing meals and drinks - Resources/Information

Local Resources:

Dietician Advice — Help and advice and any dietary concerns you may have is available from the NDDH	Please ask your CNS or keyworker to arrange an appointment for you. Or speak to your GP or doctor
Wiltshire Farm Foods www.wiltshirefarmfoods.com tel:0808 1099514	Frozen ready meals delivered for free- to suit all palates. Sugar free, gluten-free, softer foods, hearty meals, & mini-meals
Top Meals on Wheels —01237 424257 Email: topmealsonwheels@hotmail.co.uk	Family firm that delivers fresh cooked food FREE to Appledore, Northam, Bideford and Westward Ho!
Oakhouse Foods: Ready Meals www.oakhousefoods.co.uk tel:0333 370 6700	Oakhouse Foods in Wiltshire provide frozen ready meals delivered all over the UK. Browse the largest range of frozen ready meals and desserts in the UK.
North Devon Council - 01271 327711 Email: customerservices@northdevon.gov.uk	For advice and information.

National Resources:

Macmillan Cancer Support Line www.macmillan.org.uk Call 0808 808 00 00 — 7 days a week 8am—8pm	Calls are free of charge from all consumer landlines and mobile phones plus all mobile networks. Please note that calls to this number are not free when made from outside the UK. From outside of the UK call on +44 207 091 2230
Marie Curie Support Line — Living with a terminal illness and looking for support www.mariecurie.org.uk/help/support/marie-curie-support-line	Calls are free of charge from all consumer landlines and mobile phones plus all mobile networks. The Support Line is open 8am – 6pm Monday to Friday and 11am – 5pm Saturday
NHS UK/NHS Choices www.nhs.uk	Hints and tips on all aspects of eating a healthy-balanced diet—not specifically for cancer patients.
The Royal Marsden NHS Foundation Trust http://www.royalmarsden.nhs.uk/your-care/living-and-beyond-cancer/eating-well	Useful advice and help from the world’s first hospital dedicated to cancer diagnosis, treatment, research and education.

Other Resources :

Macmillan Booklets:	Recipes for people affected with cancer - MAC15201
	Healthy eating and cancer— MAC13612
	Eating problems and cancer— MAC13613
	Heart Health and Cancer— MAC14637
	The Building Up diet— MAC13614
	Managing weight gain— MAC12167