

Living With and Beyond Cancer Information Sheet

6. Eating and Appetite

During cancer treatment, you may lose your appetite. This may be because you feel sick or tired, or because food and drink taste different. You may no longer enjoy certain foods or find that all foods taste the same. Food may taste very sweet or salty, or you may have a metallic taste in your mouth.

As many as 1 in 4 people with cancer suffer with loss of appetite or difficulty with eating. This can be a result of the cancer itself, such as a tumour blocking the throat or gullet, or the side effects of treatment e.g. nausea, taste changes, sore mouth, diarrhoea, constipation and food aversions. Loss of appetite can also be a feature of depression and exhaustion. In addition, the loss of appetite or difficulty in eating can affect social activities.

How can I manage my loss of appetite or difficulty in eating?

- Many people find it easier to have small frequent snacks throughout the day rather than sticking to three meals a day. Keep snacks handy to eat whenever you can, bags of nuts or crisps, dried fruit or cheese and crackers are light and tasty. Try a yoghurt, peanut butter or fromage frais instead if you like them.
- Try to eat when your appetite is at its best. For many patients this is in the morning – why not try a cooked breakfast or porridge if you are feeling able to prepare it
- You may need to change the balance of your diet to try and maximise your calorie and protein intake. For example, choose full-fat foods wherever possible, such as those labelled 'luxury' or 'thick and creamy' rather than 'light', 'diet' or 'low fat'.
- It may be possible to stimulate your appetite using medicines, such as low dose of steroids ask advice from your doctor or GP
- Eat well on the good days to make up for those days when your appetite is poorer.
- If swallowing is difficult try using nourishing drinks such as milkshakes or smoothies. Ask your GP, keyworker/nurse or dietician (if appropriate) for information on high energy drinks that could be prescribed.
- Use seasonings, spices and herbs and pepper to flavour your cooking. If your mouth is sore, you may find that some spices and seasonings make it worse.
- Try marinating meat in fruit juices or wine, or cook it in a strong sauce such as curry. Sharp tasting foods such as fresh fruit, fruit juices and boiled sweets can be refreshing and leave a pleasant taste in your mouth. However, be careful if your mouth is sore as these may feel painful to eat.
- Try to eat your meal in a room where you feel relaxed and where there are no distractions
- Try to make your food look as attractive as possible. Put small portions on your plate and garnish it with lemon, tomato or parsley
- Use plastic cutlery if you notice a metallic taste in your mouth
- If possible ask someone else to prepare your food so that you are not too tired to eat it.
- If you are experiencing problems with feeding tubes you should contact the dietician or community nurse.
- Your appetite can be affected if you are tired, feeling sad or anxious. It is important to address these issues and there will be further advice elsewhere in this directory SOON
- Some people find cold foods taste better than hot foods. If your sense of taste or smell has changed it can sometimes help to serve at room temperature

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6. Eating and Appetite - Resources/Information

Local Resources:

Dietitian 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!

National Resources:

World Cancer Research Fund https://www.wcrf-uk.org/	World Cancer Research Fund International is a not-for-profit association related to cancer prevention research related to diet, weight and physical activity.
British Dietetic Association (BDA) www.bda.uk.com	Information around food facts and how to improve diet and health, giving practical guidance to both healthy & sick people.
Diabetes UK www.diabetes.org.uk	Advice on diabetes
CORE www.corecharity.org.uk	Advice on all digestive conditions
Macmillan Cancer Support https://www.macmillan.org.uk/information-and-support/coping/maintaining-a-healthy-lifestyle/healthy-eating	Information on all aspects of supporting a healthy lifestyle. Booklets are available FREE from the website but the Seamoor Unit can order any in on request.
NHS UK/NHS Choices Live Well	Hints and tips on all aspects of eating a healthy balanced diet—not specifically for cancer patients
The Royal Marsden NHS Foundation Trust https://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.
Macmillan Cancer Support Line www.macmillan.org.uk Call 0808 808 00 00 — 7 days per 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. If you are calling from outside of the UK call on +44 207 091 2230
Marie Curie Support Line — Living with a terminal illness and looking for support http://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

Other Resources :

Macmillan booklets:	Eating problems and cancer— MAC13613
Recipes for people affected with cancer - MAC15201	Heart Health and Cancer— MAC14637
How are you feeling? - MAC11593	The Building Up diet— MAC13614
Healthy eating and cancer - MAC13612	Managing weight gain— MAC12167
Marie Curie booklet:	Loss of appetite