



Eating well when you have cancer

*a guide for cancer patients
when eating may be difficult*

Patient

BOROMINIA VINCIT Information
Series

Eating well when you have cancer

A guide for cancer patients when eating may be difficult



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Foreword

This is one of a series of booklets written to provide information for patients and their relatives. It's impossible to include everything you may want to know. Everyone will have specific questions about what they can and can't do, and when. Your doctor, nurse or dietitian will be able to answer specific questions. However, many questions or concerns are common to all people and this booklet tries to answer them.

This booklet has been prepared by dietitians from the Nutrition and Dietetic Department at The Royal Marsden. It answers many of the questions that have been asked by patients who want to eat well when they have cancer and their carers.

We hope you find it helpful and would welcome your comments so that the next edition can be improved further.

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Introduction

Eating a varied and healthy diet is important for all of us. The body needs a variety of nutrients from the food we eat, so eating a balanced diet is essential. The World Cancer Research Fund (2007) has published its diet and lifestyle recommendations. These recommendations are aimed at people with or without cancer and are summarised below. So when your appetite is good and your weight is normal, the following simple ideas can help you eat well.

- Maintain your weight within the normal BMI range
- Reduce your intake of high calorie foods and avoid sugary drinks
- Eat at least 5 portions of fruit/vegetables every day
- Eat a portion of pulses or wholegrain foods with every meal
- Reduce your intake of red meat to no more than 500g (18oz) a week and eat minimal amounts of processed meats
- Limit your alcohol intake to 2 drinks a day for men and 1 drink a day for women
- Lower your salt intake. This can be helped by reducing the amount of salty and processed foods you may consume.
- Do not use dietary supplements for the prevention of cancer



Courtesy of the Food Standards Agency



There may be times during your cancer treatment when you are unable to eat well. Losing weight or having a reduced food intake may make it more difficult for you to cope with treatment such as surgery, radiotherapy or chemotherapy. During these times you may need to change the balance of your diet to include different foods. It may also be helpful to alter when or how often you eat to make sure you try and eat enough. These may be short term or long term changes depending on your treatment and health. If you are already following a diet for particular health reasons you may wish to discuss this with a dietitian, please ask for an appointment.

For further information on healthy eating see *After Treatment* in this series

Many people who have cancer find that their disease or treatment can affect their appetite and enjoyment of food. This booklet aims to give you some ideas on what foods may be easier to eat and help you enjoy your food again. Your diet is important and this advice is aimed to help you eat well when you have cancer. It is advisable to avoid losing too much weight as this may affect any planned treatment.

What foods should I try to eat?

We should all try to eat a wide variety of different foods to make sure we get all the nutrition our body needs.

Foods	Function
Meat, fish, eggs, Tofu, soya products, pulses, such as, beans and lentils, Quorn, nuts.	These foods are a good source of protein, which is needed for growth of body tissue, muscle strength and wound healing. Some also contain fat and therefore are a good source of energy (calories). They also contain vitamins and minerals.



<p>Dairy products – cheese, milk, yoghurt (cows, sheep and goats) and fromage frais.</p> <p>Non-dairy alternatives such as soya milk, soya yoghurt.</p>	<p>These foods contain protein, fat, vitamins and minerals. If you are losing weight choose the full fat varieties. If eating non-dairy alternatives choose those that are fortified with vitamins and minerals.</p>
<p>Bread, chapatis, pitta bread, naan and roti. Potatoes, sweet potatoes and yam. Rice, pasta and noodles. Buckwheat, couscous and bulgar wheat. Biscuits and crackers.</p>	<p>These starchy foods contain energy. Some may also contain fibre, vitamins and minerals.</p>
<p>Sugar, honey, syrup, treacle. Sugary foods such as chocolate, cakes, sweets.</p>	<p>These are good sources of energy.</p>
<p>Butter, margarine, oil, ghee, cream.</p>	<p>These are good sources of energy and contain fat-soluble vitamins.</p>
<p>Fruit and vegetables</p>	<p>These are a good source of vitamins and minerals. Often they are not good sources of protein and energy. If you have a poor appetite you may need to reduce your normal quantities to enable you to eat higher energy foods.</p>
<p>Drinks</p>	<p>Aim to drink 8-10 cups or glasses each day. If you have a poor appetite choose nourishing drinks (see page 18) rather than just tea, coffee or water.</p>



Eating well when you have a poor appetite or are losing weight

When you have cancer you may need more nourishment from food and yet may not feel like eating. It is not uncommon for people to lose weight before they are diagnosed or as a result of treatment. Many people find that their appetite changes either due to their disease or as a result of their treatment or medication.

What can I do?

There are a few medicines that may improve your appetite, however they do have side effects. Ask your doctor, nurse or dietitian if they would be suitable for you.

What can I eat?

- Many people find it easier to take small frequent snacks throughout the day rather than sticking to their usual three meals a day. (Ideas for easy snacks can be found on page 15)
- Some people find that alcoholic drinks such as sherry or a glass of wine before a meal can help perk up their appetite
- Try to eat when your appetite is at it's best. For many patients this is in the morning – why not try a cooked breakfast or porridge?
- A very full plate of food may put you off eating – try having your food on a smaller plate to keep the portions small. You can always go back for more if you still feel hungry
- Choose easy to eat foods – many people find soft foods like puddings easier than difficult to chew foods like meat
- Choose full fat foods wherever possible. These may be labelled as 'luxury' or 'thick and creamy' rather than 'light', 'diet' or 'low fat'
- Use full cream milk and full fat yoghurt



- Try to have fried foods more often if you can manage them
- Don't fill up on low energy, filling foods such as vegetables and fruit
- Add extra butter, margarine or oil to bread, potatoes, sweet potatoes, pasta, rice, chapatis, rotis, noodles and cooked vegetables
- Add peanut butter, chocolate spread, lemon curd, honey, jam or marmalade to bread, toast, crackers or biscuits
- Add mayonnaise or oil based dressings to sandwich and jacket potato fillings, salads or use as a dip for crisps or chips
- Add extra cheese to pizza, sauces, soups, pasta and vegetables and extra paneer to curries
- Avoid replacing a meal with soup, as it does not have as much nourishment as a meal or snack. If you really fancy soup then always enrich it with some of the ideas mentioned below
- Add cream, sour cream, plain yoghurt, mascapone cheese or crème fraiche to sauces, soup and meat dishes
- Use evaporated milk, condensed milk or cream (pouring or whipped) to top desserts, cakes or hot drinks
- Add cream to porridge, custard and other milk puddings
- Use extra sugar, honey or syrup with cereal, drinks, fruit and desserts
- Have cream, ice cream or soya ice cream (frozen non-dairy dessert) with desserts
- Try and keep a variety of foods in your diet as this may help improve your intake



Some meal ideas

Here are some ideas for meals and snacks. The following foods can be made at home or bought from the supermarket 'ready-made' if you don't feel like cooking or want to save time or energy.

Breakfast

If this is when your appetite is at its best, why not consider having a bigger breakfast than usual?

- Cereals or porridge made with and full-cream milk. Add an extra dash of cream
- Bread dipped in milk or yoghurt
- Bread (such as soda, pitta, hardough, rye, rolls), toast, croissant, crumpets or bagels with plenty of butter or margarine
- Cooked breakfast, such as, bacon, egg, sausage, baked beans, fried bread, black pudding, hash browns
- Melted cheese on buttered toast or with bread and butter
- Sandwiches such as cheese, bacon, sausage
- French toast (bread dipped in beaten egg and fried)
- Full fat yoghurt or soya yoghurt with museli cereal, fresh fruit and sugar. Add extra toppings of honey, seeds or chocolate sprinkles
- Fruit smoothies (blended fruit, milk and yoghurt)

There is no need to stick to 'traditional' breakfast foods. Remember to eat what you fancy – some people eat sandwiches, rice porridge (congee), custard or other milk puddings etc instead.

Savoury meal ideas

You may find it easier to eat soft foods. These are marked with a *

- *Meat or bean casseroles and stews. Try with dumplings or cobblers



- *Shepherds or cottage pie, *savoury mince, *lasagne or *moussaka (can also be made with soya mince or Quorn or vegetables and pulses)
- *Spaghetti bolognaise
- *Cauliflower cheese
- Baked beans or *tinned spaghetti on toast with an egg or cheese grated on top
- *Omelettes – cheese, ham, tomatoes, Spanish
- *Scrambled egg
- *Pasta with ready made sauces – pesto, cheese, carbonara, bolognaise, creamy tomato sauce
- *Macaroni cheese
- *Jacket potatoes with beans, cheese, tuna, sausage, chilli
- *Dahl with chapatis or rice
- Fish – grilled, fried, baked, *poached or as *fish pie
- Sliced roast meat with gravy
- Stir fried meat, fish, Quorn or tofu with vegetables. Serve with rice or noodles
- Chicken korma with rice, naan or chapati
- Lamb rogan josh with pilau rice
- Thai green curry with basmati rice
- Mutton or chicken curry with rice & peas
- Chicken or potato and channa curry with roti
- Quiche
- Snacks on toast – cheese with tomato, pineapple or pickle
- Sandwiches – experiment with the fillings. Try them toasted



- Slices of pizza with extra cheese
- Grilled halloumi cheese with bread
- Feta cheese with olives and bread
- Pasties, pastry slices or sausage rolls
- Houmous or taramasalata and pitta bread
- Fish fingers and oven chips or potato waffles
- Sausages – meat or vegetarian with potato and gravy
- Meat, chicken or vegetable pie with mashed potato or chips

Desserts

Lots of puddings can be bought ready-made from your local supermarket. Most of the suggestions below can be served with custard, ice cream and cream to make them easier to eat and to add extra energy. Most of the suggestions are suitable for a soft diet.

- Mousse – home-made (avoid raw eggs), Angel Delight, Instant Whip. Ready made chocolate desserts such as Aero, Rolo and Dairy Milk
- Egg custard
- Crème caramel
- Milk jelly, blancmange
- Milk puddings such as rice pudding, semolina, tapioca
- Custard – ready to serve or made with powder
- Fruit fools and purees
- Ice cream, sorbet or soya ice cream
- Yoghurts – thick and creamy, with separate toppings, Greek yoghurt with honey
- Fromage frais



- Soya desserts
- Bread and butter pudding
- Sponge pudding
- Trifle – fruit or chocolate
- Tinned or stewed fruit
- Fruit crumble, pie or strudel
- Other pies such as banoffee, lemon meringue, Key lime, Mississippi mud pie, strawberry tart
- Pavlova
- Gateaux – strawberry, mandarin, Black Forest
- Cake – chocolate, banana, carrot, Madeira, fruit cake, Swiss roll
- Cheesecake
- Vanilla slices
- Strawberry tart
- Fruit flans
- Kulfi

Snacks

- Tortilla chips or nachos with salsa, guacamole, soured cream or cheese dips
- Oven or microwave chips
- Samosa, pakora, onion bhaji
- Falafel
- Muffins or crumpets (sweet or savoury)
- Mini spring rolls, sesame toast
- Dim sum (meat or vegetarian)



- Satay (chicken, meat or vegetarian)
- Cheese and crackers
- Fruit buns
- A slice of cake or a cake bar
- Bun and cheese
- Patties
- Toasted teacake or scone
- Crisps
- Nuts
- Chocolate
- Sweets – fruit jellies, marshmallows, fruit pastilles
- Popadums with chutney
- Prawn or vegetable crackers with sweet chilli sauce
- Breadsticks
- Pulori
- Doubles
- Fried dumplings/bakes with ackee and saltfish or fried plantain
- Flapjacks, chocolate caramel slice
- Doughnut, Danish pastry
- Biscuits – shortbread, chocolate, cream filled
- Small bowl of cereal
- Toast and butter with jam, honey, marmalade, lemon curd, chocolate spread, peanut butter or cheese
- Coconut drops



- Tamarind balls
- Home made drinks – milky coffee, Ovaltine, milky hot chocolate, milkshake, smoothie, lassi, peanut punch, sour sop
- Flavoured soya drinks

Are there any foods I should avoid?

When you are ill or having treatment you are more at risk of getting food poisoning. It is best to avoid the following foods:

- Raw or lightly cooked eggs
- Soft, ripened cheese for example Brie, Camembert, or blue-veined cheese such as Stilton
- Pâté

Good food hygiene is also important. You can find further information on the Food Standards Agency website at

www.food.gov.uk/safereating



Nourishing and supplementary drinks

A wide range of products is available, from nourishing drinks available over the counter to those that can be prescribed by your doctor. If you are not eating well or have lost weight you may need to include high energy supplements in your diet. These will help you maintain a good nutritional intake.

Nourishing drinks

There are many high energy drinks available in the supermarket, such as, milk shakes and smoothies. Some drinks are fortified with vitamins and minerals. These are a good choice if you have a poor appetite. For example

- Build Up is available in sweet and savoury flavours. The sweet flavoured drinks are mixed with milk. Add ice cream to make a thick milk shake. Build Up soup is easy to make by just adding boiling water. Hot chocolate Build Up is made by adding water.
- Complan is available in sweet and savoury flavours and is mixed with water.
- Nutriment is available in sweet flavours from most large supermarkets.

Nutritionally complete or supplementary drinks

While you are in hospital, or attending a clinic, your doctor or dietitian may prescribe special liquid nutritional supplements. These drinks may be taken in place of food or in addition to your usual meals. The dietitian will advise you how many drinks you need to take each day.

These drinks are available in a wide variety of flavours and as milk shake style drinks or juice/squash supplement.



The following are some examples of drinks that are available:

Milky flavoured drinks

These are like milkshakes and are available in a wide variety of flavours. There are also some savoury choices.

Ensure Plus milkshake style	Clinutren Iso & 1.5	Resource
Enshake	Calshake	Scandishake
Fortisip	Enrich Plus	
Fresubin protein energy drink		

Juice/squash flavoured drinks

These are non-milky and have a similar taste to squashes or cordials. They are also available in a wide variety of flavours. For example:

Ensure Plus juice style	Fortijuice	Clinutren fruit
Provide Xtra		

Yoghurt flavoured drinks

This is a yoghurt-based drink available in fruit flavours. It has a similar taste to drinking yoghurt. For example:

Fortifresh	Ensure Plus yoghurt style
------------	---------------------------

Some ideas on how to use them

- Chill sweet flavoured drinks or use them at room temperature
- Warm chocolate, coffee or vanilla flavoured drinks. Add whisky or brandy to make a delicious hot toddy
- Mix sweet flavoured drinks into cocktails (see recipes) or freeze them into ice cream or ice-lollies. Always take ice cream out of the freezer 10-15 minutes before eating it
- Powdered supplements may also be added to puddings, desserts or mixed with cream and frozen to make a high energy ice cream. Ask your dietitian for recipes



- Neutral flavoured supplements – unflavoured Scandishake, neutral Fortisip, Calogen can be used to enrich soup or purée food

Energy supplements

Energy supplements are available as powders or liquids. Ask your dietitian for advice on how much to use each day. They can be added to both food and drinks.

Glucose polymer powder

These are highly soluble; tasteless powders that dissolve easily in liquids and most soft foods.

For example

Maxijul supersoluble powder	Vitajoule
Polycose	Caloreen

How much should I add to foods and drink?

- Add three heaped tablespoons of powder to 550ml (one pint) of water. Stir and leave to dissolve, warming gently if necessary. Use it to dilute fruit squash, add to packet soups, gravies, sauces or jelly
- Add three heaped tablespoons of powder to 550ml (one pint) of full cream milk. Use this to make drinks, puddings, sauces and soups
- Add three heaped teaspoons of powder to all nourishing drinks, tea, coffee, hot milky drinks, cold milk, fruit juice, squash, fizzy drinks and hot savoury drinks
- Add two tablespoons of powder to a bowl of breakfast cereal, milk pudding, custard, yoghurt, tinned or stewed fruit
- Add two teaspoons of powder to a bowl of soup, mix into baked beans, pasta, stews and casseroles, sauces or mashed potato



Glucose liquid

These are glucose drinks, available in fruit flavours and neutral.

Polycal
Maxijul Liquid

How should I use them?

- Mix equal quantities of Polycal with still or fizzy water, fruit juice or fizzy drinks, such as lemonade or ginger ale
- Make ice cubes or ice-lollies by mixing two-thirds of the drink with one-third of water. Pour into an ice cube tray or lolly mould and freeze
- Make a fruit jelly and add one of the drinks to one full pint (550ml) of jelly mix

Fat based liquids

Calogen

Liquigen

These are vegetable fat based low volume supplements. They are available in sweet or neutral flavours. They can be taken like a medicine or added to suitable foods such as milk, soup, yoghurt, and custard. They need to be used under strict dietetic supervision.

Recipes for high energy foods and drinks to make at home

A selection of recipes is listed below for you to try, using either easily available ingredients or products available on prescription. Many of the manufacturers of supplements have their own recipes that you may find useful.



High energy foods

Savoury recipes

Fortified soup (1)

- 1 packet of instant soup or portion of tinned soup
- 1 sachet unflavoured Scandishake

Mix the soup powder with the unflavoured Scandishake. Add hot water as directed on soup packet. Mix well. This recipe works best with cream soups

Or alternatively

To one portion of soup add 2 cups (60 mls) of Calogen.

Fortified sauce

- 1 carton of ready made sauce – cheese, mushroom, creamy tomato
- 1 sachet unflavoured Scandishake

Mix together the sauce and the unflavoured Scandishake. Heat as directed on the sauce. Serve with meat, fish, pasta etc.

Mashed potato

Mix together one sachet of unflavoured Scandishake with a recommended portion of mash flakes. Make up as per instructions, using only three quarters of the water specified. Add a knob of butter and mix well. Add salt and pepper to taste.

Or alternatively

Add 1 cup (30 mls) of Calogen to a portion of instant or home made mashed potato.



Sweet recipes

Scandi ice cream (serves 3)

1 sachet of Scandishake (flavour of choice)

280 ml whipping cream

Whisk Scandishake into cream until it starts to thicken. Place in a freezer for 2-3 hours until set. Remove from the freezer 30 minutes before serving.

Cold peach pudding (serves 3)

220ml bottle of peach Ensure Plus

1 small Madeira cake

1 small tin of peaches

125 ml double cream

Place a layer of Madeira cake on the bottom of the dish. Pour $\frac{1}{2}$ carton of Ensure Plus over the layer of cake. Place a layer of peaches on top. Repeat this process until all the peaches and cake have been used. Cover with double cream and refrigerate for 2 hours.

Scandi cake

1 packet sponge mix

1 sachet vanilla Scandishake

1 egg (medium)

100 ml (5 fl oz) water

Filling:

75 g (3 oz) butter

125 g (5 oz) icing sugar

25 g (1 oz) jam

Preheat oven to 190°C/375°F/Gas 5. Grease and line the bottom of 2 x 7" sandwich tins.



Empty the sponge mix and Scandishake into a medium sized bowl. Add the egg and 4 tbsp (60 ml) water. Whisk with electric mixer, slow speed, to moisten all of the mix; increase speed to maximum and whisk for 1 minute until thick and creamy. Add a further 3 tbsp. (45 ml) of water and continue to mix for 1 minute. Divide the mixture equally between the tins. Bake in the centre of the oven for 17 minutes until firm to touch. Remove from the oven and turn out onto a cooling rack.

To make the buttercream:

Soften butter and blend with icing sugar. Beat until light and fluffy.

When cool fill with jam and buttercream and sandwich together. Sprinkle with icing sugar if desired.

Tip: Try chocolate or strawberry Scandishake for a delicious alternative. Put mixture in small cake cases for fairy cakes.

Easy yoghurt sponge (serves 2)

2 mini Swiss rolls or 2 slices of Swiss roll

200ml bottle of peach and orange Fortisip yogurt style (chilled)

50 g (2 oz) tinned mandarins, drained

Place each Swiss roll in a serving dish. Pour half a carton of Fortifresh over each serving and leave to stand until the Swiss rolls have absorbed some of the liquid. Top with the mandarin segments. This dish can be stored in the refrigerator for up to 24 hours.

Strawberry jellycream (serves 4)

1 packet strawberry jelly

400 mls strawberry Ensure Plus milkshake style or Fortisip

Dissolve the jelly in 200 ml boiling water. Allow to cool. Add the Ensure Plus and stir until well mixed. Place in the refrigerator until set.



High energy drinks

Bubbly Build up with ice cream (serves 1)

- 1 sachet Build Up (any flavour)
- 200 ml (1/3 pt) whole milk
- 6 teaspoons glucose polymer powder
- 1 scoop ice cream

Combine ingredients in a blender and process until they are well mixed and frothy. Serve immediately.

Coffee calypso (serves 1)

- 1 sachet vanilla Build Up
- 200 ml (1/3 pt) whole milk
- 6 tsp glucose polymer powder
- 1 scoop ice cream
- 1-2 tsp instant coffee

Combine ingredients in a blender and process until they are well mixed and frothy. Serve immediately.

Tropical delight (serves 2)

- 200 ml of peach and orange Fortisip yogurt style (chilled)
- 200 ml tropical flavour soft drink

Combine the two drinks in a jug and mix well. Pour into a glass to serve. Any remaining drink can be stored in the fridge for up to 24 hours.

Special cherry (serves 2)

- 200 ml bottle of raspberry Fortisip yogurt style (chilled)
- 200 ml cherryade

Combine the two drinks in a jug and mix well. Pour into a glass to serve. Any remaining drink can be stored in the fridge for up to 24 hours.



Pineapple plush

1 bottle pineapple Ensure Plus juice style or Provide Xtra (chilled)
200 ml lemonade

Combine the two drinks in a jug and mix well. Pour into a glass to serve. Any remaining drink can be stored in the fridge for up to 24 hours.

Tip: Vary the flavour of Fortijuice or Enlive used to increase the variety.

Particular problems that may affect your eating

I feel too tired to eat

It may be that you're tired to eat or can't be bothered to prepare or cook food.

“What can I do?”

Accept offers of help with shopping and cooking from relatives or friends. You may find it helpful to prepare food in advance, when you feel like cooking, rather than leave it to meal times.

You may find meals on wheels helpful, ask your nurse to refer you to Social Services

“What can I eat?”

- Make use of convenience foods and 'ready made' meals. Plan ahead and keep stocks of these in your cupboard or freezer.
- Make use of snacks that do not require much preparation. See ideas on page 15.



- Drinking a nourishing drink may be easier than eating a meal. See the ideas on page 18 for drinks to supplement small meals and snacks.

I feel sick

Nausea or sickness may be due to your treatment or medication.

“What can I do?”

There is a range of anti-sickness (anti-emetic) medicines available. Ask your doctor or nurse which would be suitable for you.

Avoid strong smells as they often make nausea worse. Try not to sit in a stuffy room, fresh air can help.

“What can I eat?”

- Cold foods or foods at room temperature usually smell less than hot foods – try tinned fruit, biscuits, dry toast, yoghurt, cereal, ice cream etc. You may be able to eat a main meal if you allow it to cool down to room temperature, as this will reduce the smell.
- Sucking boiled sweets, fruit sweets and mints may be helpful.
- Dry toast or ginger-nut biscuits may help settle your stomach.
- Remember to drink plenty. Some people find sipping fizzy drinks such as ginger ale or soda water helpful. Try herb teas that contain ginger.
- Greasy foods can make nausea worse so it may be useful to avoid these.
- Try to eat small amounts of food throughout the day, little and often, rather than having large meals.
- Anxiety can make nausea worse so try to make meals as calm and relaxed as possible.
- There is another booklet in this series which may be helpful called *Coping with nausea and vomiting*



I have a sore mouth or throat

Radiotherapy and chemotherapy can cause a sore mouth or throat. This problem can be made worse by infection, for example, thrush or by problems with your teeth or dentures.

“What can I do?”

If you have a sore mouth or throat contact your doctor or nurse who can prescribe medication to help.

“What can I eat?”

- Choose soft foods (see list on page 13). It may help to use extra sauces and gravy with your food.
- Alcohol particularly wines and spirits will irritate sore areas.
- Try to drink nutritional supplements in addition to food (see page 18).
- Foods that are not of a smooth texture such as mince and cereals can get caught in sore areas; smooth foods such as egg custard or blancmange will slip down more easily.
- Avoid very hot foods; try warm, cool or frozen foods and drinks to see which temperature is most comfortable.
- Rough and sticky foods are also hard to eat so avoid foods such as bread, crispbread, peanut butter and doughnuts.
- Salty, acidic and spicy foods will irritate sore areas. Foods and drinks to avoid include curry, chillies, pepper, tomato sauces, oranges and other citrus fruits, vinegar and crisps.
- Soup is generally very salty and low in energy. If you like soup choose creamy smooth (blended) ones such as cream of chicken, Build Up or Complan soups. See page 20 for ways of increasing the energy and protein in soups. Let the soup cool before trying.



I have a dry mouth

Radiotherapy to the head or neck area, some chemotherapy and painkillers can lead to a dry mouth. When your mouth is dry you are at increased risk of getting infections such as oral thrush, and tooth decay, which will make eating harder.

“What can I do?”

Ask your doctor or nurse about mouthwashes and medication that may reduce the chance of you getting thrush. Artificial saliva and pastilles are available and may provide useful relief of a dry mouth.

“What can I eat or drink?”

- Sip cool drinks frequently to help moisten your mouth. It will help if those drinks contain energy or protein – milkshakes, hot milky drinks, fizzy drinks, fruit juices, and fruit squash (hot or cold). Sucking ice cubes may also help.
- Choose soft moist foods that have sauces, gravy, custard, cream or syrups with them.
- Avoid sticky, chewy and dry foods such as bread, cold meat, chocolate.
- Some foods such as bread, crackers and biscuits can be dipped into liquids such as tea, coffee, milk etc to make them easier to swallow.
- Some people find sucking sweets, sugar free chewing gum or eating citrus fruits helps you produce saliva. Take care with strong, citrus flavours if your mouth is sore.

My sense of taste has changed

There are many reasons why your sense of taste may have changed, for example chemotherapy, radiotherapy, medication and sometimes the cancer itself. If you have a dry mouth you will probably also have taste changes.



“What can I do?”

Ask your doctor or nurse about mouthcare, especially if your mouth feels coated or your saliva seems thicker than normal.

“What can I eat or drink when foods taste peculiar or unpleasant?”

- If the food affected is one you eat occasionally then avoid that particular food.
- If it is a food you have often you will need to find an alternative – have hot fruit squash or milk instead of tea or coffee. Try herbal teas but remember if you are losing weight add sugar, honey or glucose. If meat starts to taste metallic then have more eggs, chicken, fish or cheese.
- If you dislike the flavour of salty foods have more sweet foods instead. If savoury foods are difficult then eat more desserts and cake.
- If you are avoiding a lot of foods ask to see a dietitian for more advice.

“What can I do if there is always an unpleasant taste in my mouth?”

This can be due to medication you are taking or to treatment but it would be sensible to see your oral hygienist to make sure its not caused by a problem with your teeth or gums.

- Try sucking fruit sweets or mints to mask the taste.
- Concentrate on the foods that you can manage most easily.
- If you are avoiding a lot of foods ask to see a dietitian for more advice.

“What can I do if everything tastes very bland?”

Sometime food may taste ‘like cardboard’ or have no taste at all. This is usually associated with extreme dryness following radiotherapy.



- Choose foods that are highly flavoured and try to increase the flavour and aroma of your food using spices, marinades, pickles etc.
- Add textures to your food, such as, crushed crisps over savoury dishes or sprinkle chopped nuts on desserts. This may be too difficult if your mouth is too dry after treatment.
- Combine different temperatures together – hot fruit pie and cold ice cream.
- If eating food is very difficult then supplement drinks will be useful to ensure you get the nutrition you need (see page 18).

I have diarrhoea

Diarrhoea may be due to your illness, treatment or medication.

“What can I do?”

Talk to your doctor or nurse who will try to work out the cause of your diarrhoea and give any necessary medication.

“What can I eat or drink?”

- Drink plenty of fluids to avoid becoming dehydrated. Aim for 10-12 glasses or cups each day. Remember fluids include milk and milkshakes, fruit juices, soup, custard and jelly as well as tea, coffee and water.
- Look out for the symptoms of dehydration. These are passing urine less often and passing small amounts of dark coloured urine.
- If these symptoms persist despite your best efforts to drink more, then contact your doctor. This is especially important if you are also vomiting.
- Eat small amounts frequently (see page 15 for ideas about snacks).
- Ask your dietitian, doctor or nurse if you need to change your diet.



I am constipated

Constipation may be due to disease, treatment or medication (especially painkillers). If you are very constipated you may feel full and suffer from nausea or sickness.

“What can I do?”

The advice for constipation is often to increase your intake of dietary fibre but this often does not have the desired effect when the constipation is not diet related. Talk to your doctor or nurse about suitable laxatives.

“What can I eat or drink?”

- Drink plenty of fluids, at least 10-12 glasses or cups each day.
- Try to take some gentle exercise.
- Please speak to your dietitian, doctor or nurse to see if increasing the fibre in your diet will be of any benefit.

I feel full too quickly

Many people find that they feel full long before completing their meal. This often happens when you haven't been eating well, have had surgery or are receiving treatment.

“What can I do?”

There are medicines that can help your stomach empty faster, ask your doctor or nurse if they would be suitable for you. Try to avoid getting constipated as this can make matters worse.



“What can I eat?”

- Small frequent snacks throughout the day are often easier than a full meal. Some people find it helpful to leave a gap between their main course and pudding.
- Choose high energy products or enrich your food with high energy products (see page 20).
- Avoid drinking lots of fluid just before you eat, as you will feel too full.
- Sit up straight at meal times if you can.
- Avoid lying down straight after eating. You may find a short walk after eating makes you more comfortable.

Frequently asked questions

“What if I am diabetic or on a cholesterol lowering diet?”

A diabetic diet generally recommends a large intake of vegetables and fruit and is low in fat. If your appetite is poor this may not be an appropriate diet for you to follow at this time. Ask your dietitian or doctor for advice.

“Should I be having a vitamin or mineral supplement?”

If you are able to eat a diet with a variety of foods you probably don't need to take a vitamin or mineral supplement. If however your appetite is poor then you may need a supplement to meet your daily requirements. Take care not to buy different vitamin and mineral preparations that provide the same nutrients as this may lead to you taking excess quantities of some vitamins and minerals.

It is important to remember that some of the vitamins and minerals can be harmful when taken in high doses and can react with some



medications. Ask your dietitian, doctor or pharmacist for advice before starting to take these supplements.

“ Should I be eating organic fruit and vegetables? ”

Organic is the term often given to food grown without the use of synthetic chemicals such as pesticides and commercial fertilizers. Some people choose to eat organic foods because they are worried about residues of these in food.

Organic farmers also use pesticides and herbicides but there are strict guidelines on which ones can be used. Research on the levels of pesticides and herbicides in organic foods shows that some samples have contained as much or higher levels of these compounds in organic foods when compared to conventionally grown fruit and vegetables.

Organic fruit and vegetables contain the same nutrients, vitamins and minerals as fruit and vegetables grown in the conventional way. However, there is some evidence that organic milk may be higher in some nutrients. What is most important is how fresh are the fruit and vegetables that you purchase. Organic foods tend to be more expensive and this may be a consideration when deciding what to buy.

It is important if you are not eating well that you take care not to fill up on fruit and vegetables at the expense of other foods which will provide more energy (calories).

“ Should I be following a 'special' diet? ”

If you are not eating well then try and follow some of the tips in this booklet.

In recent years, there has been a lot of interest in diet and cancer, and, in particular, 'complementary' and 'alternative' diets. Some people have claimed to cure or control cancer using a diet and people are often confused as to whether or not they should follow one of these.



There have been few clinical trials or research studies to see if these diets do what they claim. To date there is no scientific evidence to support claims made by complementary or alternative diets. It is unlikely once you have cancer that any change in diet will have a similar benefit as the medical treatment.

If you are considering following one of these diets, discuss it with your doctor or a dietitian. The dietitian may help you to make a choice by discussing the advantages and disadvantages of different diets. They will ensure that your diet is well balanced and meets your needs, particularly if you are having treatment that may affect your digestion or ability to eat.

Often such diets may be difficult to follow and be low in energy. They may encourage weight loss particularly if you have a poor appetite.

“ I have been following a low fat healthy eating diet, should I continue with this? ”

If you are eating well and do not have a loss of appetite or weight loss then continue to eat your usual foods. However it is more common to lose weight during treatment. During this period it is important to try and increase your energy intake. Increasing your fat intake is an easy way of making meals palatable and higher in energy. Do not worry about eating more fat, it is important to address the issue of weight loss.

“ If I am overweight does it matter if I lose weight? ”

Yes. It is not good to lose weight during treatment as it may make you more susceptible to infections and poor wound healing. Follow the advice in this booklet if you are losing weight, whatever your usual weight.



“ What is the difference between a Registered Dietitian and a Nutritionist? ”

All dietitians who work in the National Health Service are registered. That means that they all belong to a regulatory body that aims to protect the public. It ensures that dietitians are competent to practice and that they follow a code of conduct to protect the public from unprofessional or unethical behaviour. Dietitians give advice about diet that is based on sound scientific evidence.

Nutritionists, nutritional therapists or nutrition consultants are not eligible to be registered. They may have very varied training and do not belong to an outside professional regulatory body. In some circumstances the advice they give may be linked to selling nutritional supplements such as vitamins and minerals.

Conclusion

We hope this booklet has answered some of your questions and also that our suggestions have helped. If you need more help or advice, please ask your dietitian.



Sources of information and support

Food Standards Agency

Tel: 0845 606 0667 (publications)

E-mail: foodstandards@ecgroup.co.uk

Website: www.food.gov.uk

Macmillan Cancer Support

89 Albert Embankment

London SE1 7UQ

Tel: 020 7840 7840

Macmillan Support Line: Freephone 0808 808 0000

Website: www.macmillan.org.uk

Provides free information and emotional support for people living with cancer and information about UK cancer support groups and organisations. Also offers free confidential information about cancer types, treatments and what to expect.

Cancer Equality

27-29 Vauxhall Grove

Vauxhall

London SW8 1SY

Tel: 020 7735 7888

Email: info@cancerequality.org.uk

Has booklets on African-Caribbean and Chinese aspects of diet and cancer for cancer patients.



References

This booklet is evidence based wherever the appropriate evidence is available, and represents an accumulation of expert opinion and professional interpretation.

Details of the references used in writing this booklet are available on request from:

The Royal Marsden Help Centre

Freephone: 0800 783 7176

Email: patientcentre@rmh.nhs.uk



Notes/Questions

You may like to use this space to make notes or write questions as they occur to you, to discuss with your dietitian, doctor or nurse.



Where can I get help?

If you have any questions or problems related to your diet or health, please contact:

Your hospital doctor (consultant)

or one of his/her team

or the dietitian

at Hospital _____

Telephone number _____

or your family doctor

Telephone number _____



Titles available in this series

A number of Patient Information Series booklets are available on the Internet at www.royalmarsden.nhs.uk

After treatment – A guide for cancer patients

Central venous access devices – A guide for patients receiving intravenous therapies

Chemotherapy

Clinical trials

Coping with nausea and vomiting – A guide for cancer patients

CT scan (leaflet)

Eating well when you have cancer – A guide for cancer patients when eating may be difficult

Lymphoedema – A guide for cancer patients

Lymphoedema (leaflet)

MRI scan (leaflet)

Radionuclide therapy

Radiotherapy

Ultrasound scan (leaflet)

Your operation and anaesthetic

Further information about the Patient Information Series and other booklets is available from:

The Royal Marsden Help Centre

Freephone: 0800 783 7176

Email: patientcentre@rmh.nhs.uk



