

Poor Appetite



Medical Management

A lack of appetite during cancer treatment can occur for a number of reasons. You may lose your appetite because food does not taste good. Chemotherapy, radiation therapy, or cancer itself can decrease appetite. As well, feelings of anxiety and depression can affect your appetite. Please talk to your doctor or nurse for additional information about medical management of lack of appetite if you have questions about this issue.

Using Nutrition to Help Yourself

Even if your appetite is poor, you can get the nutrition you need by choosing the right food, avoiding things that may worsen a poor appetite, and carefully planning your eating schedule.

Nutrition Tips for Poor Appetite

- If you cannot eat for more than a day because your appetite is poor, call your doctor or nurse right away.
- Do not wait until you are hungry to eat. Keep snacks handy and nibble food often.
- Eat five or six small meals and snacks each day instead of two or three regular meals.
- Avoid food odors, which can worsen poor appetite. Stay away from the kitchen when food is being prepared. Ask friends and family to help you with this.
- Stick with food that has a low odor and a short cooking time. When drinking liquids, use a cup with a lid or cover to further reduce odors.
- Set some times to eat, such as every one-half to one hour. Be sure to have at least one or two bites of food at each set time. Eating often is important, while quantity and type of food are less important.
- Experiment with both hot and cold food to see what temperature is more appealing to you.
- Drink most of your liquids between meals.
- As long as you are not nauseous, eat your favorite foods any time of day.

What to Eat and Drink

- Try food that has minimal odor and is easy to prepare, such as scrambled eggs; French toast; pancakes; oatmeal; cream of wheat; cold cereal; canned peaches, pears, or fruit cocktail; and shakes and smoothies.
- If sweet things don't taste good to you, try sour, tart, or mildly bitter food and drinks, such as a smoothie flavored with frozen cranberries or lemon and lime or a liquid

supplement, such as Ensure or Boost flavored with 1 to 2 teaspoons of finely ground, decaffeinated coffee.



- Focus on convenient food, such as granola bars; fruit; nuts; yogurt; pudding; pretzels or crackers; single-serving sizes of canned fruit, tuna, or chicken; trail mix; power bars; oatmeal; hard-boiled eggs; and ice pops.
- Try frozen fruit, such as frozen grapes or frozen watermelon wedges.
- Focus on high-calorie food, such as nuts and peanut butter.
- Use liquid nutrition products, such as Ensure or Boost, to fill in the nutrition gaps if you aren't eating well.
- Try fruit smoothies, shakes, and other quick and easy blender meals and snacks.
- Add olive oil, sesame oil, or chopped nuts and seeds for extra calories.

What to Avoid

- Gas-producing food, including beans, cabbage, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, and cauliflower; onions, corn, peas, cucumbers, and peppers; and some fruit, such as cantaloupe and other types of melon, and apricots, prunes, and raw apples.
- Sugar substitutes, such as Nutrasweet, Splenda, mannitol, and sorbitol.
- Water, tea, diet soda, coffee, or other liquids without calories.
- Wheat bran and high-fiber whole wheat products.
- Chewing gum.
- Fatty, greasy, fried, and spicy food.
- Food with strong odors.
- Rich desserts, such as candy, cakes, pies, chocolate, and cheesecake.
- Food with strong odors and "long-cooking" items, such as stews, casseroles, crock pot recipes, and baked meat or fish.