



# Eating Well During Treatment

Eating well is a key part of good cancer treatment. But it's not always easy to do.

Cancer and cancer treatments may change your need and desire to eat. They can also change how food tastes, how your body responds to certain foods, and how your body uses nutrients. When you are feeling well, eating enough food to get what your body needs isn't a problem. But during cancer treatment, this may be hard to do if you have side effects or just don't feel well. You may need to change your diet to help build up the strength you need to deal with the effects of the cancer and its treatment.

Diets for people with cancer often focus on foods that are high in calories and protein, such as milk, cheese, and cooked eggs. If you lose weight during treatment, you may be told to eat more sauces and gravies, and to add more butter or oil to your food to boost calories. You may also be told to eat fewer high-fiber foods. Fiber can cause you to feel full (and make you eat less) or may cause diarrhea.

The best diet for you may not be the same for others with cancer. Your health care team can help you know what your body needs and plan ways to get the nutrients you need. Eating well while getting cancer treatment can help you:

- Feel better.
- Stay strong.
- Keep up your weight and your body's store of nutrients.
- Tolerate treatment side effects.
- Lower your risk of infection.
- Heal and recover faster.

Eating well means eating all kinds of foods that have the nutrients you need to stay healthy while fighting cancer. These include protein, carbohydrates (carbs), fat, water, vitamins, and minerals.

**Protein** helps your body repair itself and have a healthy immune system. Without enough protein, the body takes longer to get over illnesses and fight infections. People

with cancer often need more protein than usual. Good sources include lean meat, fish, chicken, turkey, dairy products, nuts, dried beans, peas, lentils, and soy foods.

**Carbs and fats** are where people get most of their calories. The number of calories each person needs depends on their age, size, and activity level. Carbs come from fruits, vegetables, breads, pasta, grains and cereal products, dried beans, peas, and lentils. Fats come from butter, oils, nuts, seeds, and the fat in meats, fish, chicken, and turkey. Fat has more calories per spoonful than proteins or carbs.

**Vitamins and minerals** are needed for proper healing. A person who eats a balanced diet usually gets plenty of vitamins and minerals. But it can be hard to eat a balanced diet when you're being treated for cancer. If that's the case, your doctor or dietitian may suggest you take a daily multi-vitamin and mineral pill. Many people take vitamins and herbs on their own. If you do, be sure your health care team knows what you're taking.

**Water** and fluids are vital to health. If you don't take in enough fluids – or if you are losing fluids from throwing up or diarrhea – you can become ill very quickly. Gelatins, applesauce, sherbet, and popsicles count as fluids. You may find it easier to eat them than to drink a glass of water. They also give you calories. Ask your doctor or nurse how much fluid you need each day to offset any you may have lost through sweating, diarrhea, or throwing up.

## Guidelines for eating well

The guidelines below let you know what kind of foods a healthy person should eat each day. Unless your needs are different, you may want to try to follow these healthy eating guidelines:

- Eat at least 2½ cups of vegetables and fruits each day.
- Choose whole grains instead of processed (refined) grains and sugars.
- Limit how much processed meat (like deli meats, bacon, and hot dogs) and red meat (beef, lamb, or pork) that you eat.
- Choose foods that help you stay at a healthy weight.
- If you drink alcohol, limit your intake. Ask your doctor if drinking will affect your treatment.

But remember, people with cancer may have different needs, especially during treatment. People who have trouble eating during treatment may need to cut down on vegetables, fruits, and grains that contain a lot of fiber. Foods higher in fat and calories might be a better choice at this time. Talk to your doctor or dietitian about your needs during treatment.

## Plan ahead: Tips for healthy eating

- Stock up on foods you like so that you won't need to shop as often. Include foods you know you can eat even when you are sick.
- Healthy snacks can help you keep up your strength and energy level and feel better. Try to keep high-protein snacks on hand that are easy to make and eat. These include yogurt, cereal and milk, half a sandwich, a bowl of hearty soup, and cheese and crackers.
- Cook food in advance and freeze in meal-sized portions.
- Ask your friends and family if they can help with your shopping and cooking. They may even take over those jobs for you.
- Talk to your doctor, nurse, or dietitian about any concerns you have about eating well.

If you have more questions about eating well or about your cancer, please call us anytime, day or night, at **1-800-227-2345**.

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