

Moving oncology care forward so that you can look forward to life's moments

*Loss of appetite
(Anorexia)*



Managing loss of appetite

A loss of appetite, known as anorexia, is common in people diagnosed with cancer and can prevent them to consume adequate amounts of food and fluids, resulting in malnutrition (under-nutrition). Anorexia should not be confused with anorexia nervosa which is an eating disorder.

Malnutrition in persons receiving cancer treatment is associated with negative outcomes such as increased hospital admissions, longer hospital stays, increased healthcare costs, increased risk for infections, reduced tolerance and compliance to treatment and reduced effectiveness of treatment. It is important that you manage your loss of appetite to ensure optimal health outcomes.

/ Managing loss of appetite and ensuring adequate energy and protein intake

What to do	What to avoid
Eat small meals regularly (5-6 per day)	Avoid fried foods, spicy foods and foods with strong odours
Eat high-protein foods first before eating other foods	Avoid filling up on drinks low in energy and protein e.g., carbonated beverages, coffee and tea
Try to take a few mouthfuls of food, even if you are not hungry	Avoid low-fat foods
Eat food and sip on liquids at room or cool temperatures	Avoid drinking liquids with meals, rather sip on liquids in-between meals (30-60 minutes before or after a meal)
Eat foods high in energy and protein (those highest in energy per serving)	Avoid tobacco products as it may suppress your appetite

What to do

	Snack frequently throughout the day
	Eat slowly and try drinks high in energy and protein when you do not feel like eating e.g., smoothies, milkshakes and oral supplements (ask your registered dietitian for the best suitable oral supplement) chew your food thoroughly
	Keep your favourite foods and drinks high in energy and protein within easy reach
	Have high-energy and protein snacks on hand e.g., crackers, nut butters, nuts, cottage cheese, dried fruit, granola bars, ice cream, cereal
	Prepare and store small amounts of your favourite meals beforehand to eat when you don't feel like cooking
	Eat when you feel the best
	Take medication with high-energy liquids
	Ask family, friends or your caregiver to make or purchase meals and have them delivered to you
	Brush your teeth, rinse your mouth or suck on hard sweets after meals to reduce after-tastes
	Sit down and have your meals with your family and friends
	Create a pleasant setting to have your meals e.g., play music and eat in a well-ventilated room

Managing loss of appetite

2 How you can increase the energy density and protein content of your food and beverages



Energy

Milk powder, syrup, honey, sugar, margarine, butter, cream, sauces, gravies.



Protein

Nut butter, cheese, use milk instead of water in soups, stews or gravies.



Ask your registered dietitian about oral nutritional supplements and powders that you can add to your food to increase the energy and protein content of your food and drinks

3 Other general recommendations



Engage in light exercises before meals to stimulate your appetite



Take prescribed pain management medication 30-60 minutes before your meal



Consider complementary approaches e.g., music therapy, meditation, aromatherapy, and massage therapy



Ask your healthcare provider about medication to treat loss of appetite

Life Oncology units have multidisciplinary teams that can support you during your journey to recovery – this includes registered dietitians (RDs).

The following are some of the areas a registered dietitian can help you in:



Assess your nutritional status and your current dietary intake



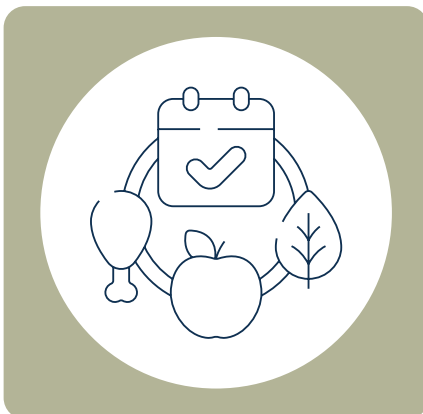
Provide you with an individualised meal plan for optimal nutrition



Recommend appropriate oral supplements to provide you with additional nutrients, including protein and energy when you are not meeting your nutritional needs through food alone



Provide you with guidelines on how to manage cancer treatment side effects that influence your dietary intake



If you need assistance with any of the above areas – ask your healthcare provider to refer you to a registered dietitian.

References

CANSA

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<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fonc.2021.682999/full>

Kidney Cancer Canada

<https://www.kidneycancer canada.ca/managing-side-effects/#loss-of-appetite-anorexia>

National Cancer Institute

https://www.cancer.gov/about-cancer/treatment/side-effects/appetite-loss/nutrition-pdq#_151

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