

Eat well; Feel better
Food tips for people with Cancer

'You are what you eat', was never more true than in the connection between food and cancer. Cancer has increasingly been identified as a "life-style" disease. Scientists are agreed that cancers are linked to where you live, to what you eat and drink, and breathe and smoke. Cumulative impacts of the toxins in our systems lead to, or impact, diseases such as cancer.

Eating healthy food is important when you are well. It is even more important when you are receiving treatment for cancer. There are no special foods you must eat or must avoid, but these suggestions will possibly help you to overcome problems connected with side effects of treatment. Cancer can not be cured by diet alone, and there is insufficient evidence to prove that 'special' diets are beneficial. Some of these extreme diets may be harmful and interfere with the success of your treatment. If you are considering drastic changes, please discuss them with your treating doctor. It is vital that you eat well to feel well and have more energy; get the best benefit from your treatment, with fewer side effects; improve your body's ability to heal and keep body-weight at a healthy level.

You need to eat energy generating foods, which help you maintain body weight. You need protein to maintain and renew the body's tissues. You need vitamins and minerals to help the body assimilate the food you have eaten. Your food plan should include:

1. Vegetables & fruit
2. Breads and cereal
3. Milk and milk products
4. Lean meats (poultry, fish) , eggs, or nuts and pulses (dal)
5. Fats (used sparingly), but not eliminated.
6. Fluids, especially water.

Food Safety.

Food safety is of special concern to cancer patients. Please bear these guidelines in mind:

1. Wash hands thoroughly before eating.
2. Wash hands before food preparation, and wash fruit and vegetables thoroughly.
3. Handle raw meats with care. Keep away from cooked foods.
4. Cook meat/poultry/fish thoroughly. Use pasteurized/boiled milk.
5. If eating away from home, avoid salads, sushi , and raw/undercooked meats and eggs.
6. Take particular care with water you drink.

Side effects and how to deal with them.

Loss of appetite: It is quite common for people to have temporary problems such as loss of appetite during cancer treatment. Ideally, you should stay at the same weight as before cancer. Losing weight during treatment is not recommended. The normal 'food pyramid' does not apply in cancer patients. The best foods now will depend on the treatment he receives. So please do talk to your doctor/dietician about your special needs.

Here are some tips you may find helpful:

1. Eat more frequent, but smaller meals. There is no rule, which says a patient should eat at "regular" meal times, or in "regular" quantities.

2. Very often, taste changes after chemotherapy. Make sure the meal looks appetizing, tempting the patient to eat.
3. Baby foods often work. Strained & pureed foods are easier to eat. You may want to add a teaspoon of non-fat dry milk (Powder) to soups or pureed foods.
4. Ice cream is a great option. So too milk shakes with fresh fruit. Jelly made with fruit juice or even soup is easily taken.
5. Dahi/lassi is easier to digest than full milk foods.
6. Please offer fruit whose skin is discarded - banana, mango, papaya, apple etc. Skin if fruit like grapes has residue of pesticides, which does not wash off completely.
7. Small amounts of meat in a broth or puree after cooking can be offered.
8. Grilled fish is excellent.
9. All vegetables can be cooked with light spice and pureed./strained.
10. Offer plenty of fluids - water, juice, soups, milk shakes; but especially water.

Above all, please speak up about changes that have happened in your taste. You may want extra salt, extra masala, extra sugar. Ask the family to give it to you. If you cannot tolerate milk products, (try dahi), ask your doctor about lactose free products available. If you have diabetes, high cholesterol, please ask the doctor for advice. Avoid foods that give gas or which bring on diarrhea.

You have already recognised the importance of a good diet in better prognosis for your recovery.

Do call or email should you need more info. Our Cancer Sahyog volunteers visit hospitals regularly. If you want someone to visit, please let us know. Cancer Helpline : 24311010

Preventing Nausea:

Hunger prolongs nausea. Eat small, frequent meals. Enjoy snacks between meals.

Keep up fluid intake – sip your drink slowly. You may find it helpful to freeze lime juice or other juice, and suck on the frozen bits. Once the worst of nausea has passed, try a ginger ale, weak tea or green tea, Popsicles, clear broth and soup.

Other useful tips

1. If you are likely to have a long wait, on a journey, or visit to the clinic, take a nourishing drink or small snack. Even a toffee in your pocket will do.
2. Chop your food into bite-sized pieces to make eating easier.
3. Eat your main meal at whatever time of day suits you.
4. Eat your favourite foods.
5. Choose foods that do not have strong smell, which could set up nausea.
6. Choose foods, which are quickly and easily digested.
7. Avoid fried or fatty foods.
8. Choose fluids that provide some energy – milk, juice, soup.
9. Eat & drink slowly
10. Chew foods well. Relax before meals. Anxiety affects the appetite.
11. Rest after eating.
12. Eat with family or friends; eat while watching TV or reading

Your appetite will improve between treatment. Eat well while you can.

Taste & Smell Changes

Your treatment may cause your sense of taste or smell may change temporarily. You may not like foods you previously enjoyed. Here are a few suggestions, which may help.

1. Eat foods, which do not have a strong smell. Cold foods may go down better.
2. Experiment with flavouring and extras like chutneys, pickles, chocolates, cheeses etc.
3. Feel free to add salt to food you find too sweet, or sugar to food which is too acidic or salty.
4. Add fruit or fruit puree to ice cream or gelatine desserts.
5. Stay away from the kitchen if cooking smells put you off.

Sore mouth or Difficulty in swallowing

You may have a sore mouth or difficulty in swallowing food:

1. Stew small pieces of meat or chicken in gravy.
2. Try smooth or blended foods, or creamy consistency.
3. Avoid foods that sting your mouth like acidic fruit (pineapple), or spicy and salty foods.
4. Avoid rough crunchy foods like hard toast and nuts.
5. Try drinking through a straw.
6. Pay special attention to mouth hygiene to prevent infection and tooth decay. Use a gentle mouthwash after meals.

For a Dry Mouth

1. Take fluids with your meal.
2. Suck on chips of ice. They also stimulate flow of saliva.
3. Add gravy or sauce, cream or custard to make foods moist.

Bowel Troubles

You may experience changes in bowel function as a result of your treatment. These are generally short –term, but unpleasant while they last. Make sure your doctor knows about them.

Constipation

1. Eat regular meals. In particular, try not to miss breakfast.
2. Drink at least 8 cups/glasses of fluid every day. If you can tolerate it, drink 2 glasses of water on an empty stomach first thing in the morning.
3. Add extra fibre to your meal. Bran flakes, oat bran, dalia, can all be added to your meal in many ways. Get creative!
4. Remember to increase fibre and fluid simultaneously!
5. Eat some fruit and vegetable daily. Stewed apple, or figs are very good. Avoid vegetables which give flatulence and gas. (peas, cucumber, onion)
6. Prune juice is a good mild laxative. (A mix of pureed apple, softened prunes and bran moistened with prune juice will do the trick)
7. Eat slowly, chew your food well. Drink slowly too, avoid swallowing air.

Diarrhoea

1. Drink fluids between meals to prevent dehydration. Aim for 8 glasses of fluid a day.
2. Eat small, light and frequent meals.
3. Avoid coarse, indigestible foods – skin/seed of fruit, vegetables).

4. You may find yourself unable to digest milk during treatment. Try hard cheese or dahi, or try soya milk drinks.

If you have severe diarrhoea, please omit all fruit and vegetables, and eat a low residue diet for a few days.

Low residue diet.

1. Drink plenty of fluids. Drink slowly. Avoid coffee or strong tea. A light green tea may help. Avoiding milk will also help.
2. Avoid all fruit/vegetable, except potato at first.
3. Gradually introduce foods as you tolerate them.
4. Cream crackers and other light biscuits, white bread, may help.
5. Rice, corn flakes, etc are light on the digestion.
6. Avoid pepper, strong curry with spices, and fatty foods.
7. Add foods one at a time. Once you can tolerate them, add the next, and so on.

HAPPY EATING!