

DON'T FEEL LIKE EATING?

TIPS TO BOOST YOUR
APPETITE & NUTRITION WHEN
YOU DON'T FEEL LIKE EATING.





HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR APPETITE

Changes in appetite are common with cancer and during cancer treatments. If you are not eating as well as usual and you don't get the nutrients your body needs, this can result in loss of weight, muscle mass and strength, which can slow recovery and lead to breaks in your treatment.

This guide provides tips on how to stimulate your appetite and boost your nutrition when you don't have an appetite.

Before you start to read, if you've lost your appetite, try to identify what is causing this.

Are you feeling nauseous?

Do you have a dry mouth?

Are you suffering from constipation?

Are you feeling anxious?

Do foods now taste different and unappealing?

All of these symptoms can have a major impact on your desire to eat. By identifying how you feel, you will be able to choose the solution/s that help most.



WAYS TO STIMULATE YOUR APPETITE

EAT BREAKFAST

Eat breakfast, ideally within half an hour of waking. Eating breakfast kick starts your metabolism after a long fast overnight and gets your body ready for the day. A nourishing breakfast will provide you with energy, meaning you are more likely to be active during the day, in turn further increasing your appetite.

If you have a dry mouth or can't face a big breakfast, try a nutritious smoothie. It will be easier to swallow and can be sipped slowly. If you feel nauseous, a small slice of rye or sourdough toast with nut butter may be more appealing. For constipation, try prune, fig & apricot compote or stewed fruit on yoghurt.

ADD CINNAMON

Cinnamon contains hydroxychalcone, a component that can increase appetite. This claim is mainly anecdotal and the exact role cinnamon plays in appetite is not known. Try cinnamon tea, as well as adding cinnamon to milky drinks, stewed fruit and rice pudding.

TRY HERBAL TEAS

Herbal teas like peppermint, spearmint, dandelion, burdock, anise and liquorice have traditionally been used to increase appetite. Try drinking a cup or two throughout the day to increase your liquid intake and potentially increase your appetite.

WAYS TO STIMULATE YOUR APPETITE



TAKE A DAILY WALK

Walking is proven to have health benefits – both physically and mentally. It helps to stimulate your appetite, calm your thoughts and maintain muscle mass and strength.

If you are unwell, the idea of taking a walk might seem too much but it doesn't have to be far or challenging. A simple turn around the garden or a walk to the end of your street can help. If you really can't manage a walk, try sitting by an open window and taking in some fresh air before eating.

BOOST YOUR BITTER FOODS

Bitter foods may not sound very appealing, but foods such as rocket, endive, radicchio, kale and bitter lettuces can help to stimulate liver and gall bladder function, which in turn can help to spark your appetite. They also contain good amounts of fibre, which can help symptoms of constipation.

TRY SWEDISH BITTERS

Swedish Bitters - a mix of herbs and roots - contain berberine, which stimulates the production of digestive enzymes to improve digestive function as well as encouraging good bile flow for the emulsification of fats. They can also help with nausea and improve appetite if you feel that your digestion is a bit sluggish. Some favourite alcohol-free brands are Nature's Answer and Flora. NOTE: Swedish Bitters could interfere with some medications - please consult your health care professional before taking Swedish Bitters. Follow the directions of the manufacturer. It is not recommended to take them for more than 2 weeks at a time.

A photograph of a person sitting on a bed, reading a book and holding a cup of coffee. The person is wearing a grey sweater and black socks with white polka dots. The bed has white linens. The text 'WAYS TO STIMULATE YOUR APPETITE' is overlaid in a purple box at the top left.

WAYS TO STIMULATE YOUR APPETITE

AND...RELAX

Reduce stress where possible. Cortisol and other stress hormones such as adrenaline can reduce your appetite and cause a reduction in digestive processes. It may be hard when you are worrying about things, but try to relax. It will make you feel better.

If you find it hard to switch off, try a colouring for relaxation, a meditation app like Headspace or Calm, listen to music or an audio book, or practice breathing exercises.

BOOST MAGNESIUM IN THE BATH

Boost your magnesium levels by taking regular Epsom salt baths. Low magnesium levels can contribute to a poor appetite. Epsom salt is naturally occurring magnesium and sulphate and bathing in Epsom salts may allow the body to absorb magnesium through the skin. Epsom salts baths are also very relaxing and can help you sleep. They can also help relieve constipation.

Note: If you are feeling less well, for safety it is wise to bathe when somebody else is at home with you, or try an Epsom salt foot soak instead.



WAYS TO BOOST YOUR NUTRITION

Even if you try a range of techniques to boost your appetite, you still may not feel very hungry. Here are some tips to help ensure you're still getting the nutrition you need.

EAT LITTLE BITS. FREQUENTLY

Eat small, frequent meals if you feel full up quickly. Try eating five to six small meals a day, rather than three large meals. Small meals can be less daunting and less filling than large meals and eating them frequently still allows you to consume the same amount of food overall.

USE A SMALLER PLATE

If you're not feeling hungry, getting a huge plate of food can put you off eating even more. Try serving meals on a smaller plate, as this will feel less overwhelming if your appetite is poor.

You'll also feel less anxious about wasting food and if you manage to finish everything on your plate, you will mentally feel like you're making progress.



WAYS TO BOOST YOUR NUTRITION

DRINK NOURISHING FLUIDS

Drink nutrient-dense fluids especially if you are struggling to maintain your weight. Choose more nourishing drinks such as milk (preferably organic dairy or plant based e.g. almond), milk based drinks, vegetable juices and smoothies. Avoid taking too much fluid just before a meal, as you will feel too full for food.

If you are really battling to take on the nourishment you need right now, here are some healthy, nourishing shakes you can buy and make up at home. Add some of your own ingredients, like some frozen fruit, to make them taste more homemade.

HUEL <https://uk.huel.com>

PURITION <https://www.purition.co.uk>

If you are experiencing marked weight loss and/or difficulties with your eating and drinking you should seek expert nutrition advice.

EAT WHAT YOU WANT. WHEN YOU WANT

Break with convention and eat the foods you fancy when you feel like it. If your appetite is better in the morning eat more then and have cereal, porridge or something on toast in the evening. Listen to your body, not societal norms.

ZAP UP YOUR ZINC

Try increasing foods rich in zinc such as sesame seeds, pumpkin seeds, lentils, chickpeas, beef, lamb, prawns, spinach, cashew nuts and quinoa. Zinc is required for good digestive function, including the production of hydrochloric acid, which regulates digestion in the stomach.

Your sense of taste can also be affected by a lack of zinc in your diet. So if this is a factor affecting your appetite, be sure to boost your zinc-rich foods.



WAYS TO BOOST YOUR NUTRITION

FORTIFY YOUR FOOD

Fortify foods by adding extra calories and protein without increasing the volume. Try adding a dash of extra virgin olive oil or ground almonds to soups, grated cheese to omelettes, avocado to smoothies or drizzling vegetables with tahini.

Choose snacks that are nutrient dense. You want to look for snacks that are high in healthy calories and protein. Try sweet potato wedges with hummus, hard-boiled egg, falafel balls, Greek yoghurt or coconut yoghurt with berries, or almond butter with oatcakes.

AVOID STRONG SMELLS

Avoid strong smells or cooking smells if they put you off eating. Cold foods such as hummus, yoghurt, cottage cheese, egg frittata or gazpacho (cold soup) may be more appealing as they have less of an aroma.

ADD HERBS & SPICES

Your ability to taste or smell may have changed, which is putting you off eating. Try using different herbs and spices in cooking to see if that helps. Fenugreek, black pepper, mustard seeds, caraway, coriander, ginger, cayenne pepper, fennel, rosemary, thyme, tarragon can all help to aid digestion.

If taste changes are a major cause of your appetite loss, ask for my Taste Changes guide, which has a number of tips to help cope with this.

WAYS TO BOOST YOUR NUTRITION

ACCEPT HELP

Accept offers of help. Family members and friends are often keen to help in any way they can, so let them. If they want something specific to do, suggest that they batch cook meals for you to freeze and use as needed. Allowing them to make you a drink, fetch your groceries or prepare food for you at times when you are feeling tired can be a big help. Talking to someone else can also help relieve your anxiety, which in turn will boost your appetite.

Also consider buying pre-cooked meals to take the strain off. Here's a list of some great pre-made brands

Bol Foods

Yorkshire Provender Meal Pots

Tideford Organics

Rod & Bens

Soupologie Soups

Biona Organic

Higgidy Pies & Quiches

Pollen + Grace

And here's a list of companies that deliver pre prepared meals to your door

Cook - www.cookfood.net

allplants - www.allplants.com

Wiltshire Farm Foods - www.wiltshirefarmfoods.com

Everdine - www.everdine.co.uk

Thyme - www.itsthyme.co.uk





FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT
MY SERVICES VISIT:
WWW.THECANCERDIETITIAN.COM

I'm Meredy Birdi. I have been a cancer dietitian for nearly 20 years and have worked with literally thousands of people with cancer. I'm one of the few specialists with dual qualifications as a cancer dietitian and a nutritional therapist. This means I combine medical insight with a holistic point of view.

When you are diagnosed with cancer, are undergoing treatment, or are in recovery, you may feel like control of your life has been taken away. You may feel confused, scared, anxious, low, angry or just plain exhausted.

Taking back control and doing something positive helps alleviate many of these feelings. And that's where I come in. I help you take control of your diet – to make you feel better, both physically and emotionally. There is a huge amount of conflicting dietary information out there and it can be hard to know what to believe or what is relevant to your particular situation.

As an expert in cancer nutrition, I work one-on-one with you to investigate your specific dietary needs and show you how to put the latest dietary advice into practice in a way that works in your life. I can also advise you about nutritional supplements, should you need them. This isn't just about giving you information though. I'm here to listen to you, support you and encourage you as you take back control.

If you or a family member has cancer and would benefit from nutrition or dietary advice, contact me for a consultation.

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Additionally, you are welcome to follow my **Cancer Dietitian Facebook** page or join the **Nourish Club**, my free Facebook group for people with or affected by cancer.