

Nutrition and Food Concerns

Online version with active resource links at <http://cancer-help.me/nutrition>

Nutrition During Cancer Treatment

As a person diagnosed with cancer, you should try as often as possible to eat healthy, nutritious foods. It is also beneficial to find safe and effective ways to add physical activity to your life, stop any tobacco or nicotine use, limit the amount of alcohol you drink and find positive ways to manage stress. Eat as healthy as you are able to will provide your body and mind good nutrition and energy to help you better cope with the treatment and its side effects.

With cancer it is important to maintain a healthy body weight. Sometimes the side effects of surgery, radiation therapy, immunotherapy, and chemotherapy may cause a person to eat less and lose weight. Some treatments may cause weight gain, eating more food than usual may curb nausea.

This is called symptom management or palliative care. Talk with your health care team about any symptoms you experience and any change in those symptoms.

Content adapted from websites below.

Resources for Additional Information:

- [American Cancer Society Nutrition Information](#)
- [Cancer.Net, Food Safety During and After Cancer Treatment](#)
- [Cancer.Net, Food and Cancer Risk](#)
- [Cancer.Net, Food to Avoid During Cancer Treatment](#)
- [ASCO Answers, Food Safety & Cancer Treatment](#)
- [NIH, NCI, Nutrition in Cancer Care \(PDQ®\)](#)
- [American Institute for Cancer Research, Serving Up Better Health](#)
- [CancerCare.org, The Importance of Nutrition During Treatment](#)

Nutrition Guidelines During Cancer Treatment

- **Maintain a healthy weight.** For people who are overweight, this may mean losing weight. This also means avoiding too much weight loss by getting enough calories every day.
- **Get essential nutrients.** Include protein, carbohydrates, fats, and water.
- **Be as active as you can.** Take a walk, do chores, dance, move your body! You may lose muscle mass and increase your body fat with little activity.

Ways to get essential nutrients and manage a healthy weight

- Experts recommend eating plant-based foods, such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and plant-based proteins such as nuts, beans and tofu. Lean protein (in moderation) and low-fat dairy products are also recommended. Avoid highly processed foods and red meats as much as possible. Learn more about the effect of diet / nutrition during and after treatment [HERE](#).
- Nutrition counseling with a registered dietitian (RD) or a registered dietitian nutritionist (RDN), can help people with cancer get essential nutrients, such as protein, vitamins, and minerals. It can also help them maintain a healthy body weight. Ask your health care team to help you find one of these professionals. You can also find a dietitian through the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics [HERE](#).

Side Effects and Nutrition

Cancer treatment side effects such as nausea, mouth sores, and taste changes may make it difficult to eat or drink. Tips to help get the nutrition you need:

- If water tastes unpleasant to you, take in more liquid through foods and other drinks. Eat soup or watermelon, drink tea, milk, or sports drink as great alternatives. Consider flavoring water by adding fresh cut fruit.
- If food tastes bland, try seasoning it with flavorful spices. For example, try using lemon, garlic, cayenne, dill, and rosemary. If your mouth is sore, you may need to choose non-acidic and non-spicy foods until it heals.
- Eat 6 small meals throughout the day instead of 3 large meals. Make sure you reach your calorie goal with these smaller meals.
- If meat is no longer appealing, get protein from other foods like fish, eggs, cheese, beans, nuts, nut butters, tofu, or high-protein smoothies.
- If you have a metallic taste in your mouth, suck on mints, chew gum, or try fresh citrus fruits. Use plastic utensils and cook in nonmetal pots and pans. Also, try brushing your teeth before eating.
- If you have mouth sores or a gum infection, use a blender or food processor to make the texture of vegetables and meats smooth. For added smoothness and more calories, add butter, mild sauces, gravy, or cream. Try juicing or smoothies, the extra moisture can help soothe a sore mouth.
- Some side effects are treated with medication. If your side effects are affecting your hydration and nutrition, talk with your health care team.

Recursos en Español:

- [American Cancer Society, Nutrición para la persona con cáncer durante su tratamiento](#)
- [NIH, Instituto Nacional Del Cáncer, La nutrición en el tratamiento del cáncer \(PDQ®\)](#)
- [Cancer.Net, Recomendaciones sobre nutrición durante y después del tratamiento](#)