



# Loss of Appetite

## Key Points

- ✿ Drug treatment may change the way food tastes or cause side effects such as mouth sores that make it hard to eat.
- ✿ There are foods you can remove or add to your diet that will help you to maintain good nutrition and avoid weight loss.
- ✿ Call your doctor to report any symptoms that may be contributing to your decreased appetite or any significant weight loss or gains.

Eat well, especially during treatment for cancer. Be aware that drug therapy may change the way food tastes or smells. Side effects such as mouth sores and trouble swallowing can make it hard to eat. Nausea or fatigue can also result in a lack of appetite. Talk with your health care team if you are not hungry or if you find it difficult to eat. Don't wait until you feel weak, have lost a lot of weight, or are dehydrated.

## Tips to Help Your Appetite

- ✓ Being active can increase your appetite. Try a short walk every day.
- ✓ Eat a healthy snack every few hours rather than 3 large meals.
- ✓ Make the most of any food that interests you, like 'comfort foods' from your past.
- ✓ If a food's smell bothers you, don't eat it.
- ✓ Use a small plate and put just a little bit of food on it.
- ✓ Eat with family or friends or watch television while you eat.
- ✓ Eat snacks and meals on a schedule and keep to the schedule, even if you are not hungry.
- ✓ If you aren't eating a lot, make the most of each spoonful. Choose high protein, high calorie foods. Add protein powder to your food.
- ✓ Choose foods that are smooth or moist (baby food versions of pureed fruits).
- ✓ Drink 2 quarts a day to stay hydrated but don't have a big glass right before a meal or snack.
- ✓ Make it easier to eat. Keep small portions of foods around. Will someone shop or cook for you?
- ✓ Eat your food at room temperature. Stay away from foods that are very hot or very cold (temperature).
- ✓ Stay away from spicy, heavy, and acidic foods and foods high in salt or sugar.

## Tips for Problems That Make it Hard to Eat

- ✓ **A bad taste in your mouth:** Suck on hard candy with strong flavor like mint or lemon. Try rinsing out your mouth with ginger ale. If it is a metallic taste, use plastic cutlery. Try cold foods.
- ✓ **Mouth sores:** Choose easy-to-eat foods: bananas, watermelon, strawberries, pears, applesauce, rice, toast, peanut butter, popsicles, Jell-O®, Boost® or Ensure® (protein shake), cottage cheese, yogurt, creamed soups, cheese, dried fruits, milk.
- ✓ **Nausea:** Bananas, watermelon, pears, applesauce, rice, toast, peanut butter, popsicles, Jell-O®, Boost or Ensure (protein shake), bland crackers, or dry cereal.
- ✓ **Constipation:** Walk and move around, eat high fiber foods, and drink 2 quarts a day (particularly water). Talk to your doctor about taking a stool softener or laxative.

## Talking with Your Doctor

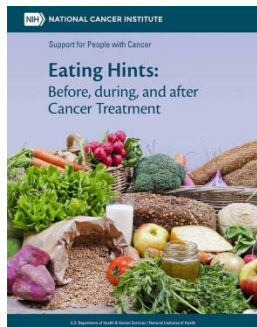
**What your doctor needs to know:** Tell your doctor about your symptoms that may be making your appetite/eating problems worse such as mouth sores, heartburn, constipation, depression, nausea, fatigue, or pain.

### Medications

- Review ALL your medications with your doctor or clinical pharmacist to see if any combination of medications is contributing to your appetite problems. If so, discuss if any changes are possible – different medication, different dose, taking it at a different time of the day.
- If you have nausea, ask about medications. If you are already taking anti-nausea medications, are changes needed?
- Discuss the use of prescription medications to increase appetite.

### Questions to ask

- What foods should I eat?
- Are there high-protein drinks or vitamins that can help me?
- How much water, or other liquids, should I drink each day?
- What exercises can help increase my appetite?
- Would it be helpful for me to see a registered dietitian (RD) since I am still losing weight?



## Resource

For more ideas about how to get the nutrition you need, see the National Cancer Institute's booklet: Eating Hints: Before, During, and After Cancer Treatment. The book is available in the Resource Center for Patients & Families (located inside the hospital cafeteria on the first floor), in the Health Library in the patient portal, and online at:

[www.cancer.gov/publications/patient-education/eating-hints](http://www.cancer.gov/publications/patient-education/eating-hints)