

Loss of Appetite

Loss of appetite or poor appetite is a common problem that occurs with cancer and its treatment.

No one knows exactly what causes loss of appetite. It may be caused by the treatment or by the cancer itself. Emotions such as fear or depression can also take away a person's appetite. Ask your doctor or nurse about ways to lessen these emotions. Sometimes it is the side effects of treatment such as nausea, vomiting, or changes in food's taste or smell that make a person feel like not eating. If this is the cause, work with your doctor/nurse to get the side effects under better control.

Loss of appetite can last for just a day or two or be ongoing. The following suggestions may help:

- Choose higher calorie foods that contain a lot of protein.
- Try liquid or powdered meal replacement, such as "instant breakfast", during times when it is hard for you to eat food.
- Frequent small meals throughout the day may be easier than fewer big ones. You might be able to eat more and you won't get so full.
- Keep snacks within easy reach so you can have something whenever you feel like it. Cheese and crackers, muffins, ice cream, peanut butter, fruit, and pudding are good choices. Take a portable snack with you when you go out, such as peanut butter crackers or small boxes of raisins.
- Even if you don't feel like eating solid foods, try to drink beverages during the day. Juice, soup, and other fluids like them can give you important calories and nutrients. Milk based products also provide protein.
- If possible try having a snack at bedtime. It won't affect your appetite for the next meal.
- Sometimes changing the form of a food will make it more appetizing and help you eat better. For example, if eating whole fruit is a problem, try mixing fruit into a milk shake.
- Try softer, cool, or frozen foods, such as yogurt, milkshakes, or popsicles.
- Take advantage of times when you do feel well, and have a larger meal then. Many people have a better appetite first thing in the morning.
- During meals, sip only a small amount of fluids, because drinking may make you feel full. If you want to have more than just a small amount to drink, have it 30 – 60 minutes before or after a meal.
- Make mealtimes as relaxed and pleasant as possible. Presenting food or meals in an attractive way may help also.
- Vary your diet by trying new foods and recipes.
- Regular exercise may help your appetite.
- A Dietician specializing in cancer patients is available to help; ask your doctor or nurse.