

A side effect of cancer treatment can be weight change or decreased appetite. A lack of nutrition can make you feel exhausted and low on energy. Changes to your body can affect your self-esteem. This fact sheet will cover:

- The importance of maintaining your health
- Tips for keeping your appetite and eating better
- Ways to cope with weight loss
- Care for yourself emotionally



Maintaining Your Health

Talk with your doctor. Treatment side effects like nausea can make eating difficult. Things to discuss with your doctor include:

- Changes in taste or smell
- Trouble swallowing or feeling if you are choking while eating
- Feeling puffy or bloated
- The use of dietary supplements

Visit your dentist. Mouth or teeth problems can affect your eating habits. Talk with your dentist about your oral health throughout treatment.

Talk to a certified dietitian or nutritionist. A dietitian or nutritionist can help create a new diet and answer further questions.



Tips to Increase Your Appetite

Do your best to eat a nutritious diet during and after cancer treatment. Eating right isn't just about making you feel better. It is also important for your health and recovery.

- Avoid strong food odors, which can bring on nausea.
- Rinse your mouth often to eliminate any bad taste.
- Try to eat a balance of different foods every day, including proteins, fruits and vegetables,
- When having a meal, try to eat protein foods first.
- Make your meals more pleasant by using colorful place settings, flowers or music.
- Eat smaller meals frequently throughout the day rather than two or three big meals.
- Try healthy snacks between meals.
- Try to eat at the same time each day, even when you are not hungry.
- Keep snacks handy. People tend to eat more when food is readily available.
- At times when your appetite is not good, rely on foods you really like.



Coping With Weight Changes

Treatment side effects can cause weight loss or gain. This may affect the way you feel about your appearance. A poor body image may cause you to feel self-conscious and anxious. It's important to keep the following in mind:

Your feelings about body image, weight and physical changes are valid. Creating a safe space to explore how you are adjusting can provide relief.

Surround yourself with people who encourage you to be yourself and who recognize your feelings.

Take time to relax. Wear clothes that make you feel good, or get a massage.

Give yourself credit. Practice praising yourself about any of the things you like about yourself, such as your laugh, your kindness and other positive qualities.

Ask for help with practical matters. Having friends and family members help with day-to-day tasks such as grocery shopping or preparing meals can help relieve stress.

Join a support group or seek individual counseling to cope with your weight change and body image. Support groups provide a chance to meet and interact with other people who can understand your experience. An oncology social worker can help people cope with this 'new normal.' CancerCare offers free face-to-face, telephone and online support groups led by professional oncology social workers.

CancerCare® Can Help

For over 80 years, CancerCare has empowered millions of people affected by cancer through free counseling, resource navigation, support groups, educational resources, advocacy and direct financial assistance. Our oncology social workers improve the lives of people diagnosed with cancer, caregivers, survivors and the bereaved, by addressing their emotional, practical and financial challenges.

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