

**Sussex
Oncology
Dietitians**

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Managing a poor appetite: “I just don’t feel like eating”

Cancer Services

**Providing support
for patients
and their families**

What is this information about?

This guide will help explain why you may not feel like eating and give you tips to manage it. It uses a question-and-answer approach to help explain and support you when you just do not feel like eating.

It includes a list of foods that you may find easier to eat, and advice to help you if you find eating difficult.

Why have I been given this information?

Having no appetite or interest in eating can be very frustrating and upsetting for you and your family, and friends. They may ask you what you would like to have to eat or what you fancy and honestly you do not want anything.

If people around you find it difficult to understand the changes in your eating habits, it can be helpful to try and explain what is happening to you.

Keep this information handy so you can share it with them. They may find it helpful to know what foods you find easier to eat, and why.

Not being able to eat as you used to can lead to weight loss and a lack of energy. We may not be able to reverse the weight loss, but we hope this information may help you to remain at a steady weight, enjoy your food more, and give you more energy to enjoy your usual activities.

I used to really love to eat and enjoy a variety of foods. Why do I feel differently now?

The effects of cancer and its treatment can cause:

- a lack of hunger
- a sense of feeling full soon after starting to eat
- a change in taste
- a sense that eating takes a lot of effort.
- a dry or sore mouth making eating and swallowing difficult.

You are not alone. Many patients tell us eating becomes a chore with little or no pleasure. This can be caused by the physical effects of your cancer or treatment. It can affect your ability to eat or your interest in food.

Why are some foods (like bread) especially difficult?

Bread can be doughy and often draws the saliva out of the mouth so it can feel like a lump as you chew it. This can make eating more of an effort.

It may help to use melt-in-the-mouth food in place of bread. These are more crumbly foods that will dissolve in your mouth more easily. Examples include cheddars, tuc crackers, quavers, skips, pom-bears or pringles.

This can also apply to tough meat. You may prefer to have meat minced or cooked in a stew or casserole.

What foods are easier to eat?

It may help to take the effort out of eating by having foods that are naturally as soft and moist as possible.

Try foods that are more likely to slip or slide down and those that don't require so much chewing.

For example:

- Creme caramel, panna cotta, egg custard, creme brulee, fruit in jelly, individual trifles, rice pudding, dairy rice with strawberry, instant whip, sorbet, frozen yoghurt, creamy or Greek yoghurt with honey.
- Soya yoghurt alternatives, vegan soya dessert, Gu plant based chocolate and vanilla cheesecake.
- Tinned, stewed fruit or sponge pudding with added cream, evaporated milk, yoghurt, creme fraiche, custard or ice cream, chocolate sponge and chocolate sauce.
- Soup of your choice, chicken noodle soup, well cooked noodles or pasta in a sauce, soft scrambled egg or omelette, well-cooked dhal, potato topped fish or mince, corned beef pie, cauliflower cheese, risotto, tinned spaghetti with grated cheese.
- Milky porridge, Weetabix softened with warm milk, malted milk drinks, hot chocolate, yoghurt style drink, milk shakes or smoothies, adapted with plant-based alternatives- almond, oat or soya milk as desired.

As well as the above foods, it can help to make sure that when you eat a dry food, you pair it with a food with a higher fluid content. For example:

- Grapes or cherry tomatoes, pineapple or apple with cheese, fresh melon with sliced prosciutto.
- Try smooth dips like baba ganoush, taramasalata, tzatziki, humous, feta dip or fish, liver or mushroom pate. Have these with melt in the mouth biscuits, crisps or bread sticks.
- Mashed up avocado with cream cheese or sour cream, tuna mayonnaise or egg mayonnaise, prawn cocktail with a soft pitta or the inside of a jacket potato (mashed with butter).

Using fluids and sauces with foods would also help. For example:

- Add gravy or sauces such as cheese, bolognaise sauce, mushroom sauce, curry sauce.
- Use mayonnaise, tartar sauce, Marie rose, pesto, ketchup, teriyaki, hoisin sauce, Caesar dressing, honey mustard dressing.

What if I cannot eat a full cooked meal?

When you have no appetite, a cooked meal can feel overwhelming. Try small and frequent meals or snacks. Use a small tea plate. Remember eating something is better than nothing.

Individual readymade meals and puddings can be a handy thing to store as a standby as they are instantly accessible and do not need much preparation.

My mouth is dry. What might help it feel better?

- Brushing your teeth and tongue regularly with a small soft toothbrush.
- Carbonated fluids can help. Try lemonade, ginger ale, tonic or soda waters.
- Fruits juices like apple, mango, apple and mango mixed, apple and elderflower or pineapple juice are less acidic but could give some natural energy.
- Try sucking a mint, boiled sweet or a square of chocolate.

Who can I contact for further information and advice?

All of these numbers have voicemail, so please leave a message if you cannot get through to anyone, and we will get back to you.

Oncology dietitians

Worthing Hospital, Lyndhurst Road,
Worthing BN11 2DH

01903 205111 Ext. 84549

Chichester dietitians

St Richards Hospital, Spitalfield Lane,
Chichester, PO19 6SE

01243 788122 Ext. 35201

Oncology dietitians

Sussex Cancer Centre, Bristol Gate, Brighton BN2 5BE

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