

# Caregiver Support

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Preparing meals for a loved one with cancer is an important and caring act, but it can sometimes be a frustrating task. People with cancer may not feel like eating for a variety of reasons, or they might feel full after just a few bites.

Caregivers often view food preparation as an expression of love for another person. You may worry that a poor appetite and difficulty eating are signs that your loved one is not doing well in general. The tips in this handout may help reduce stress for everyone.

## Meal Planning Tips

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- Above all, try to make eating a pleasant experience.
- Use music, conversation, TV, or reading materials to distract a loved one during meals and snacks.
- Avoid offering food if your loved one is feeling nauseous or does not want to eat.
- Offer a variety of foods from all food groups. A varied diet will provide important nutrients your loved one needs to stay healthy.
- Look for cookbooks for people with cancer at the library, at the bookstore, or online. Many of these books address how side effects from cancer treatment may affect the appetite and offer ideas to make healthy foods more appealing when a person's appetite is poor.

- Encourage your loved one with cancer to eat six to eight snacks or small meals per day instead of three larger meals. Small meals are often better tolerated than big ones.
- Take advantage of times when your loved one is hungry. Have snacks readily available since the hunger may last only a few minutes.
- Stock up on high-calorie, high-protein nutritional supplements.
  - Nutritional supplements can be purchased as snack bars, as puddings, and as calorie- and protein-rich beverages that are the consistency and flavor of fruit juice.
  - You can make homemade supplements, too.
- Focus on simple, appetizing ways to add calories and protein to meals and snacks.

## Tips to Increase Calories

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- Add butter, oil, or margarine to bread, potatoes, vegetables, or soup.
- Use more mayonnaise, salad dressing, and peanut butter.
- Choose higher calorie drinks, such as whole milk, juice, sugar-sweetened soft drinks, chocolate milk, instant breakfast drinks, or other nutritional beverages.
- Make shakes with whole milk, ice cream, or sherbet. Add flavored gelatin, fruit, peanut butter, chocolate, or other desired foods for extra calories and flavor.

## Tips to Increase Protein

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- Keep hard-cooked eggs in the refrigerator. Use them to make egg salad or add them to green salads, casseroles, soups, or vegetable dishes. (Do not serve raw or undercooked eggs to avoid the risk of harmful bacteria.)
- Add cheese to potatoes, soups, or sandwiches.
- Eat peanut butter or cottage cheese with fruit.
- Use fortified milk in place of regular milk. To make fortified milk, blend 1 quart of whole milk and 1 cup powdered nonfat dry milk. Chill at least 6 hours before drinking.

## What If I Need Additional Support?

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If you have additional concerns related to cancer and nutrition for your loved one, make an appointment with a registered dietitian (RD). He or she can help you learn ways to prevent or reduce cancer-related weight loss.

The RD can also provide tips for dealing with some of the nutrition-related side effects of cancer. The RD may also evaluate the patient's diet, offer information on dietary supplements, and suggest recipes you can try.