

A Guide to Eating Well with a Small Appetite

Practical tips and support for people undergoing cancer treatment

Issued by: _____

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Introduction

It is not uncommon for people to lose weight before they are diagnosed with cancer or during treatment. Many people find that they lose their appetite when they are having treatment or feeling unwell because of their cancer.

We understand it is hard to be enthusiastic about preparing food and eating well when your appetite is poor, and you are feeling fatigued. By eating as well as you can, you are giving your body the energy and nutrients it needs to rebuild damaged cells, fight infection and cope with the side effects of treatment. This will hopefully help you recover more quickly.

This booklet is designed to give you practical support if:

- your appetite is poor, and you are not eating as well as usual.
- you require a high energy / high protein diet to help prevent weight loss and maintain your energy levels.

The aim is for you to:

- Try to enjoy your food more.
- Eat regular meals and snacks (e.g. three small meals and two extra snacks per day).
- Add extra calories and protein to foods (food fortification).
- Try to have a variety of foods so that you don't miss out on essential nutrients including vitamins and minerals.
- Avoid choosing low fat, low calorie or 'diet' foods and instead opt for the high calorie, high protein versions.
- Avoid low calorie or 'diet' drinks and instead try some homemade nourishing drinks.
- Try some energy saving ideas so that you can pace your activities and preserve your energy levels.

Fortifying foods

If your appetite is poor and you are not eating as well as normal, the following tips may help you to get more calories (energy) without necessarily having to eat more quantities of food.

You can fortify foods in the following ways:

Fortified milk:

- Add 4 tablespoons of skimmed milk powder (e.g. Marvel, supermarket own brand) to a pint of full fat milk.
- Use this in place of your ordinary milk, e.g. on breakfast cereal, in milky drinks, custard and mashed potato.
- Store in the fridge and use within 24 hours.

Savoury foods:

- **Soups:** add cream, grated cheese, milk powder, evaporated milk, puréed beans or lentils, ground nuts, croutons.
- **Sauces:** add butter or margarine, cream, full fat natural yoghurt, grated cheese, ground nuts.
- **Mashed potato:** add cream, butter or margarine or olive oil, grated cheese, full fat mayonnaise or salad cream.
- **Vegetables:** add butter, margarine or olive oil, grated cheese, full fat natural yoghurt, full fat mayonnaise.

Sweeter foods:

- **Puddings e.g. sponge, crumble, pies:** serve with custard, full fat yoghurt, cream, fromage frais or evaporated milk. Use ice-cream, sorbets, and nuts for extra toppings.
- **Breakfast cereals or porridge:** serve with fortified milk, evaporated milk, full fat yoghurt or cream. Use sugar, honey, golden syrup, puréed fruit and nuts for extra toppings.
- **Toast, crumpets, toasted tea cakes, muffins etc:** spread liberally with butter / full fat margarine, chocolate spread, lemon curd, cream cheese, jam, marmalade, peanut / almond nut butter.
- **Milky puddings:** use full cream milk or evaporated milk to make milk jellies, Angel Delight and instant whips.
- **Milky drinks:** use fortified or evaporated milk to make up your favourite milky drink e.g. hot chocolate, malted milk or cappuccino.

Plant based diets

Non-dairy milk alternatives:

If you prefer to use non-dairy milk alternatives, good options are soya*, almond, and oat milks. Choose full fat, non-organic varieties that are fortified with vitamins and minerals.

*Soya products contain more protein than most oat, rice or almond based dairy alternatives. *Current evidence shows that two soya servings (equivalent to 400ml /day soya milk) are considered safe for women with breast cancer.*

Practical ways to increase protein intake on a plant-based diet:

Food	Protein / 100g	Portion providing 20g protein	Tips for use
Gram Flour (milled chickpeas)	23g	87g	Use to make: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pancakes or flatbreads • Pakora, poppadoms and bhajis • Vegetable 'frittata' type dish
Tofu (soya bean curd)	8g	250g	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scramble with turmeric and black salt • Add silken tofu to noodles soups or miso
Peanut flour	48g	42g	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mix with coconut cream, maple syrup and soy sauce to create satay-type sauce. Brush onto mushrooms before grilling or thin with coconut milk for use in stir fries • Add to porridge, overnight oats and smoothies
Powdered peanut butter	50g	40g	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sprinkle onto porridge, blend into smoothies, stir into batters,
Ground almonds	21g	95g	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add to porridge or overnight oats • Use as a flour alternative in baking
Seitan (made from wheat gluten)	26g	77g	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use as a meat alternative in stir-fries, curries, fajitas or tacos
Chickpea pasta	20g	100g	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use in place of wheat pasta • Add to soups or stews
Soya Mince (TVP)	52g	38g	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add to vegetable chilli, Bolognese, or curries
Foods modified to increase protein			High protein bread, bagels, breakfast cereals, snack bars, soya 'yoghurt' and soya drinks are all available – check labels for nutritional values.

Further build up advice on a plant based diet :

<https://clinox.info/Commissioning/Prescribing/Dietitian/BOB%20ICB%20Food%20First%20-%20advice%20for%20eating%20if%20you%20have%20lost%20weight%20-%20PLANT%20BASED.pdf>

Meal Ideas

Breakfast

- Cereal or muesli with full cream or fortified milk. Add sugar, honey or sliced banana.
- Porridge made with full cream or fortified milk. Add golden syrup or dried fruit as a topping.
- Bread, toast or croissant with butter and jam, chocolate spread or peanut butter.
- Scrambled egg (make sure the eggs are well cooked through) or baked beans on toast.
- Full fat Greek or soya yoghurt with honey and soft or stewed fruit as a topping.

Lighter meals

- Fortified soup with bread & butter.
- Toast with beans, cheese, egg, ravioli or tinned spaghetti.
- Sandwiches with meat, cheese, fish or egg.
- Jacket potato with cheese, beans or tuna.
- Pizza slices with a small salad.

Main meals

- Include a protein source e.g. meat, fish, egg or pulses.
- Include a starchy carbohydrate source e.g. potatoes, rice, bread or pasta.
- Add butter or oil to vegetables.
- Add a creamy sauce for extra calories.

Puddings

- Thick and creamy yoghurts / mousse.
- Tinned sponge puddings with cream or ice cream.
- Milky puddings e.g. rice pudding, egg custard, trifle, milk, jelly, crème caramel, crème brûlée, soya desserts or trifles.

Snack ideas

Savoury snack suggestions

- cheese & biscuits / crackers / oatcakes.
- toasted crumpets with butter and cheese.
- toasted bagel with butter and cheese.
- pitta bread or breadsticks with humous or taramasalata
- feta cheese & olives.
- finger sandwiches – remove the crusts and have with a soft filling e.g. tuna mayonnaise, cream cheese, peanut butter.
- sausage rolls, cocktail sausages, pork pies.
- samosas, pakoras, onion bhajis.

- poppadums with chutney.
- spring rolls or sesame toast – try dipping into sweet chilli sauce.
- crisps / prawn crackers.
- tortilla chips / nachos – try eating with guacamole, salsa or soured cream.
- nuts – peanuts, cashews, pistachios, brazil, walnuts etc.

Sweet snack suggestions

- thick & creamy yoghurts, mousses, trifles, ice cream.
- cakes, pastries, toasted teacakes, croissants, malt loaf.
- chocolate biscuits or mini chocolate bars.
- cereal bars, flapjacks, chewy oat bars, popcorn.
- dried fruit mixtures e.g. raisins, cranberries, apricots, dates, figs, sultanas.
- boiled sweets, toffees, mints, jelly babies, marshmallows etc.

Nourishing Drinks

If you are struggling with solid food, you may find some of these drinks easier to manage:

Milky Drinks:

Use fortified full fat milk to make up the following drinks:

- **Hot milky drinks** - Ovaltine, Horlicks, Milo, Bournvita, hot chocolate, milky coffee. You can also add 1 tablespoon (tbsp) of double cream to hot milky drinks.
- **Cold milk drinks** - milkshakes made with cordials, fruit juice, milkshake syrup or powder. Add a scoop of ice cream. Try fruit smoothies made from fruit blended with full fat milk, ice cream, full fat yoghurts and honey or malt.
- **Savoury drinks** - instant soups, Bovril or Marmite made up with full fat or fortified milk.
- **Yoghurt drinks or smoothies** - can be purchased or make your own with full fat milk or yoghurt.

Homemade recipes for nourishing milkshakes & smoothies:

- **Banana Milkshake** - Add 1 banana, ½ pint cold fortified milk, a pinch of cinnamon and 1 tablespoon of double cream to a blender. Blend for 10-15 seconds and serve.
- **Iced Coffee** - Dissolve 2 tablespoons of coffee in a little warm milk. Top up with 1/3 pint of full fat milk, 2 tablespoons of sugar and 1 scoop of ice cream. Whisk and chill before serving.
- **Milky Moment** - Add 1-2 tablespoons of vanilla ice cream or double cream to 1/3 pint of milk and 1 tablespoon of skimmed milk powder. Add a choice of flavoured milkshake powder, drinking chocolate or pureed fruit/soft fresh fruit.
- **Banana Chocolate Smoothie** - Mix 1 tablespoon of full fat natural yogurt and ¼ pint of full fat milk together. Add 1 banana and a choice of *either* 1 teaspoon smooth peanut butter or ½ tablespoon of chocolate spread. Blend and serve.

- **Fruit Yogurt Drink** - Mix 2 tablespoons of full fat fruit yogurt and ¼ pint of full fat milk together, add pureed fruit or soft fresh fruit tinned.
- **Mango Milkshake** – Mix 100g of mango pulp, 200ml of full fat milk and 100ml of full fat plain yoghurt (e.g. Greek yoghurt), with a spoon or in a shaker/blender.

Top Tips:

You may wish to add 20g vitamin fortified milkshake powder (e.g. Nesquik or Tesco milkshake mix) to your nourishing drink for added vitamin and minerals.

High protein shakes and smoothies can be made using 300ml of plant-based dairy alternative and one scoop of protein powder (provides approx. 20g protein depending on brand and liquid used).

More Nourishing Drink Recipes:

Homemade fortified milky drinks:

<https://clinox.info/Commissioning/Prescribing/Dietitian/BOB%20ICB%20Homemade%20fortified%20milky%20drinks.pdf>

Homemade fortified dairy free drinks:

<https://clinox.info/Commissioning/Prescribing/Dietitian/BOB%20ICB%20Homemade%20fortified%20dairy-free%20drinks.pdf>

Homemade fortified fruity drinks:

<https://clinox.info/Commissioning/Prescribing/Dietitian/BOB%20ICB%20Homemade%20fortified%20fruity%20drinks.pdf>

Supplement Drinks

There are a range of ‘over the counter’ supplement drinks that are available from most pharmacies and supermarkets. They are available in a range of sweet, savoury and neutral flavours. Powdered drinks (to be made up with full fat milk) include: *Complan*, *Meritene* and *Aymes Retail*. Ready to drink versions include: *Complan Smoothie*, *Nurishment* and *Nurishment Extra*. Huel RTD (Ready to Drink 500ml) provides a plant-based option for an ‘over the counter’ supplement drink.

If your food intake and weight has not improved within four weeks and you continue to lose weight, ask your nurse or doctor to be referred to a Dietitian or contact your GP who may be able to advise you about nutritional supplements available on prescription.

Frequently asked questions

Should I take a vitamin & mineral supplement?

If you are struggling with a poor appetite or reduced food intake, you may not be getting all the nutrients you need from your diet and may benefit from taking a multivitamin & mineral supplement. People following a plant-based diet should take a multivitamin & mineral supplement suitable for vegans.

Choose a product that has approximately 100% RNI (Reference Nutrient Intake) for all nutrients. Suitable options include Sanatogen, Superdrug, Boots or supermarket own brand A-Z multivitamin & mineral supplements. If you struggle to take whole tablets, a chewable option is Centrum Fruity Chewables or as an alternative Superdrug chewable A-Z.

Warning: high dose vitamin & mineral supplements are not recommended as they may interact with your cancer treatment. If you have any queries about other supplements or food additives, please discuss with your health care professional.

Vitamin D

It is difficult to get enough vitamin D from diet alone - the main source of the vitamin is skin exposure to sunlight. All adults should consider taking 10 mcg /day during the winter months. Some 'at risk' groups (e.g. over 65's, people who cover their skin when outside) should consider taking a daily supplement of 10 mcg /day all year round.

Is it safe to take probiotics?

The 'beneficial' bacteria found in certain food products or supplements may benefit our health by improving the types of bacteria in our gut (bowel).

However, if your immune system is not working properly or if you are on chemotherapy, you should not take them until 14 days after completion of treatment. There is not yet enough evidence to support taking probiotics during immunotherapy treatment.

Should I be following an alternative diet for treating my cancer?

There are several alternative diets claiming to treat or cure cancer. Some of these diets recommend avoiding certain foods or taking large doses of vitamins and minerals. There is no scientific evidence that these diets can make the cancer shrink, cure the disease, or reduce recurrence.

These diets are potentially harmful because they are often low in energy (calories) and protein and they tend to be high in fibre, making them very filling. They can cause weight loss and potentially serious nutritional deficiencies in people who are already experiencing problems eating due to their cancer treatment. **If you are thinking of following an alternative diet, please discuss it with your consultant, nurse specialist or specialist dietitian.**

Helpful hints if your appetite is poor:

- Let someone else do the cooking if you can. The smell may affect your appetite. If you prepare food yourself, use foods that are easy and less energy consuming to prepare.
- Have small frequent meals and snacks every 2 - 3 hours during the day rather than trying to eat three meals.
- Make the most of the times when you do feel hungry, keep snacks handy to nibble on, such as crisps, nuts, biscuits, dried fruit.
- Take a short walk outside in the fresh air or have a small glass of your favourite wine or sherry which may help to stimulate your appetite before a meal.
- Avoid filling yourself up on too much fluid before a meal.
- Eat meals slowly, chew the food well and relax for a while after each meal.

If cooking is difficult try ready-prepared meals either from the supermarket or delivered to your home e.g. Wiltshire Farm Foods, www.wiltshirefarmfoods.com (0800 077 3100) or Oakhouse Foods, www.oakhousefoods.co.uk (0845 643 2009).

Energy saving ideas:

Planning ahead, pacing and listening to your body may help to offset tiredness and fatigue that makes daily activities difficult, and may help to manage weight loss.

Planning ahead

- Try to identify tasks which cause extreme tiredness.
- Ask others for help with daily activities. Plan your day so that you have time to rest and do the things you want to do.
- Spread tasks out over the week.
- Use equipment to help save energy (eg sitting or perching instead of standing).
- Organise tools and materials in the work area (kitchen etc) and store items within easy reach.

Pacing activities

- The aim of successful pacing of activities is to avoid exhaustion.
- Many activities do not need to be done quickly or all in one go.
- Try taking things more slowly.
- Take planned breaks before you become tired.
- Save some tasks for later in the day or even the next day.
- It is easier to keep some small reserves for the next task than it is to build those reserves after they are depleted (exhaustion).

Listening to your body

When we perform everyday tasks, we tend to be in 'automatic' mode, but this is not very useful to those who have high levels of fatigue and tiredness.

To pace yourself and plan ahead, you can learn to 'hear' what your body is telling you before, during and after activities.

For example:

Try looking closely at one particular task (shaving, dressing, bathing etc):

- At what point does the feeling of significant tiredness begin?
- Are there natural breaks in the task?
- Could you sit down to do the activity?
- Is there someone who could help you? (Talk to your GP, District Nurse or Social Worker).

For expert advice and assessment related to pacing and equipment, request referral to an Occupational Therapist.

Further reading / recommended references:

- **British Dietetic Association** – www.bda.uk.com/foodfacts/home
- **Cancer Research UK** – www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/causes-of-cancer/diet-and-cancer
- **Drink Aware** – www.drinkaware.co.uk/
- **Be Healthy Bucks** – <https://bhb.maximusuk.co.uk/> or 03332 300177
- **Macmillan Cancer Support** – <https://www.macmillan.org.uk/cancer-information-and-support/impacts-of-cancer/healthy-eating-and-cancer>
- **Move More: Your guide to becoming more active** – Macmillan Resource with DVD available from the Cancer Care & Haematology Unit, Stoke Mandeville Hospital or online
- **NHS Choices** – www.nhs.uk/Livewell/goodfood/pages/the-eatwell-guide.aspx
- **World Cancer Research Fund (WCRF)** - <https://www.wcrf-uk.org/uk/health-advice-and-support/eat-well-during-cancer>

Notes recommended by your Healthcare Professional:

Free Prescriptions

All cancer patients undergoing treatment for cancer, the effects of cancer or the effects of cancer treatment can apply for an exemption certificate for a free prescription from their GP.

How can I help reduce healthcare associated infections?

Infection prevention & control is important to the well-being of our patients and for that reason we have infection prevention & control procedures in place. Keeping your hands clean is an effective way of preventing the spread of infections. We ask that you, and anyone visiting you, use the hand sanitiser available at the entrance to every ward before coming in to and after leaving the ward. In some situations hands may need to be washed at the sink using soap and water rather than using the hand sanitiser as hand sanitisers are not suitable for use when dealing with patients who have symptoms of diarrhoea.

Please remember that this leaflet is intended as general information only. We aim to make the information as up to date and accurate as possible, but please note that it is subject to change. Please therefore always check specific advice on any concerns you may have with your doctor. If you need advice or further assistance, please contact our patient advice and liaison service (PALS). Call 01296 316042 or email bht.pals@nhs.net