

Loss of Appetite

Loss of appetite or poor appetite is one of the most common problems that occurs with cancer and its treatment. No one knows exactly what causes loss of appetite. It may be caused by the treatments or by the cancer itself. Emotions such as fear or depression can also take away a person's appetite. Ask a nurse or social worker about ways to lessen these emotional difficulties. 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 or nurse to get the side effects under better control.

For some people, loss of appetite happens for just a day or two; for others, it's an ongoing concern. Whatever the reason, here are some suggestions that might help:

- Try liquid or powdered meal replacements, such as "instant breakfast," during times when it is hard for you to eat food.
- Try frequent small meals throughout the day, rather than fewer big ones. It may be easier to eat more that way, 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 possibilities. 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 drinks also provide protein.
- If possible, try having something 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, fresh fruit is a problem, try mixing fruit into a milkshake.
- 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, when they are well rested.
- During meals, sip only small amounts 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 also help.
- If your doctor allows, have a small glass of wine or beer during a meal. It may help to stimulate your appetite.
- Regular exercise may help your appetite. Check with your doctor to see what options are open to you.