

Eating Well When You Have Cancer

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This information has been gathered from multiple sources including:

- + Eating Well When You Have Cancer
- + Living a Healthy Life with Chronic Conditions
- + Canada Food Guide - Government of Canada
- + Johns Hopkins Medicine - <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org>
- + University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Centre - <https://www.mdanderson.org>
- + BC Cancer - Provincial Health Authority
- + Cancer Care Alberta - Alberta Health Services
- + Oncology Nursing News
- + Compassion House
- + Pradolab - University of Alberta
- + Mayo Clinic
- + Juravinski Cancer Centre

Disclaimer

I am not specialized in nutrition or cancer care. I am educated in Health and Wellness including healthy eating, physical activity, tobacco and alcohol consumption, injury prevention and many other topics.



What I am presenting you today is an assembly of information from reliable accurate resources. The information today does not replace professional advice from people on your healthcare team.



Any changes in your diet, elimination of food, or addition of vitamins or supplements should always first be discussed with your doctor and/or dietician.

A big question – What do I eat after a cancer diagnosis

Some questions that you might be asking yourself:

Am I having side effects from my cancer or cancer treatment?

If I am not having difficulty eating, am I following a balanced diet?

Do I need to change what I am eating?

What if my eating habits aren't perfect? (most of us are guilty of this)

What if I am too upset/worried/angry to eat?

Nutrition and Cancer

It is important that you are eating well through out all stages of your cancer journey



Eating well will:

Keep your energy level up

Keep your body strong

Ensure you are getting all the nutrients your body needs

Help you cope with side effects

Help you recover after treatment

Reduce your risk of infection

Canada food guide

- + Eat a variety of healthy foods each day, including protein, vegetables, fruits, and whole grain foods
- + Drink plenty of water and limit highly processed foods.
- + When your feeling good, you can plan meals using the Canada Food Guide



Nutrients that your body needs

- + Protein
- + Carbohydrates (Carbs)
- + Fat (healthy)
- + Vitamins
- + Minerals
- + Water

Limiting Alcohol

Before choosing to drink during treatment you should talk with your doctor

- + Alcohol can interfere with some cancer treatments and medications
- + The treatments may not work as well, dehydrate you, make you feel full, or make other side effects worse

Current Low-Risk Alcohol Drinking Guidelines

- + There is a continuum of risk associated with weekly alcohol use where the risk of harm is:
 - + **0 drinks per week** – Not drinking has benefits, such as better health, and better sleep.
 - + **2 standard drinks or less per week** – You are likely to avoid alcohol-related consequences for yourself or others at this level.
 - + **3-6 standard drinks per week** – Your risk of developing several types of cancer, including breast and colon cancer, increases at this level.
 - + **7 standard drinks or more per week** – Your risk of heart disease or stroke increases significantly at this level.
 - + Each additional standard drink radically increases the risk of alcohol-related consequences.
- + Consuming more than 2 standard drinks per occasion is associated with an increased risk of harms to self and others, including injuries and violence.
- + No matter where you are on the continuum, for your health, less alcohol is better.

How does Cancer treatment affect your diet?

- + Weight changes (loss/gain)
- + Fatigue
- + Low red blood cell counts
- + Constipation
- + Dry mouth
- + Heartburn and reflux
- + Nausea and vomiting
- + Diarrhea
- + Gas, bloating, and cramps
- + Taste changes
- + Food cravings or dislikes
- + Sore mouth and throat
- + Swallowing problems

Changes to appetite – one of the most common problems associated with cancer treatment

Some days you may not feel hungry either from nausea, exhaustion, mouth sores, stress, or changes to your palate

Sometimes there may be times you feel like you just can't eat

On days you don't feel hungry, it is important to stay hydrated and have a drink that provides nutrients and energy

- Try milk, smoothies, pureed soup, or a liquid nutritional supplement drink (ensure or boost)

Commercial nutritional supplements also come in a variety of forms including powder (can be added to drinks, smoothies, gravies, or soup), pudding, and protein bars

Some nutritional supplements include fiber to assist with changes to bowel movements

What can you do if your appetite is low

1

Eat smaller more frequent meals and snacks rather than 2-3 larger meals

2

Drink beverages between meals rather than with meals. Liquids can fill you up leading to less food being consumed

3

Avoid foods that cause gas and bloating (beans, broccoli, corn, cabbage, carbonated drinks)

4

Eat when you have the most energy and keep mealtimes flexible

5

Make every bite count by adding high calorie ingredients to your meals and snacks

Weight changes

Weight loss

- + Very common during cancer treatment
- + Can be related to side effects of treatment, fatigue, difficulty swallowing, stress, lack of appetite, or the cancer itself.
- + Weight loss is usually caused by an increase in the number of calories needed by the body and loss of muscle and fat.
- + Unintended weight loss as small as 5% can cause a decline in quality of life and survival

Weight gain

- + Not as common as losing weight
- + Reasons include emotional eating, being less active, hormone therapy, steroid use, drugs that cause the body to retain fluid, treatments that cause early menopause
- + you can work with your healthcare team to understand why you have gained weight
- + Weight maybe lost after treatment is completed or by making changes to your food and lifestyle choices

Importance of protein

- + The body utilizes protein to build and maintain muscle mass, heal tissues, and build a health immune system
- + If you have cancer, are receiving treatment for cancer, and/or recovering from surgery, you require more protein than what is recommended under the Canada Food Guide

[The Importance of Nutrition to Prevent and Treat Low Muscle Mass \(youtube.com\)](#)

Nausea and vomiting

- + Nausea is feeling sick to your stomach and vomiting is throwing up
- + Nausea and vomiting are common side effects of cancer treatment, especially chemotherapy
- + Nausea may be triggered from foods, smells, certain events, or a time of the day (ex: when you first wake)
- + Doctors can recommend or prescribe anti-nausea drugs (anti-emetics). To help prevent nausea and vomiting you may be prescribed more than one medication
 - + It is important to follow the instructions as provided even if you are not experiencing nausea. Nausea and vomiting are easier to prevent rather than treat once it starts

Managing nausea and vomiting

- + Eat smaller meals and snacks all day
 - + Snack on dry foods
 - + Keep dry foods close to your bed so you can snack before bed or first thing in the morning
- + Don't let yourself get hungry as this can make nausea worse
- + Eat slowly
- + If nausea occurs with treatment appointments, try not eating for 1-2 hours before and after
- + Avoid foods that are very sweet, greasy, fried, or spicy
- + Sip water, sports drinks, herbal teas. Warm liquids may be more tolerable than hot or cold
- + Try ginger tea or ginger candies
- + Avoid caffeine
- + Don't drink with meals. Try to drink at least 30 minutes before or after meals

Managing nausea and vomiting continued

Rinse your mouth to remove unpleasant tastes

Sit up after eating, if you need to lie down, keep your head and shoulders propped up

Don't wear clothes tight around the waist

IF YOU CAN'T STOP VOMITING OR CAN'T KEEP LIQUIDS DOWN FOR MORE THAN 24 HOURS, CALL YOUR HEALTHCARE TEAM OR GO TO YOUR LOCAL EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT

Changes to bowel habits - Diarrhea

- + Some treatments and medications can cause, loose frequent stools
- + 2 or more loose stools in 4 hours
- + It needs to be managed quickly as it can lead to dehydration and fatigue
- + Try managing diarrhea by
 - + Limiting sugary, caffeinated, or carbonated drinks
 - + Choose foods low in fibre (White bread/rice/pasta/bananas/potatoes without the skin)
 - + Limit greasy, fried spicy or sugary foods
 - + Avoid items with sorbitol, prunes, papaya, and rhubarb (this acts like a natural laxative)
 - + Limit dairy (milk) products

Changes to bowel habits - Constipation

- + Stool is hard, dry and difficult to pass
- + Affects about ½ of people with cancer
- + Caused by various treatments and some medication
- + May also be caused by changes to your food and fluid intake and how active you are
- + Doctors can prescribe or recommend stool softeners or laxative
- + Other ways to help with constipation
 - + Slowly add more fibre and water to your diet (bran, whole grains, veggies, fruit beans)
 - + Read labels and choose items with more than 4 grams of fibre per serving
 - + Drink more fluids
 - + Eat 4-5 prunes or drink 125 ml (1/2 cup) of prune juice
 - + Be more physically active if you can, try gentle exercises

Changes to taste

Foods may taste bland, foods may all taste the same, some foods may taste sweeter, bitter or have a metallic taste

If food is bland - add more herbs and spices or strong sauces

Onion, curry, jerk, and garlic have strong flavors. Try tomato or soy sauce, and salsa.

If food has metallic taste - use plastic utensils instead of metal ones, try cooking with glass cookware, add tart flavors (if you don't have mouth sores), or add sweet flavors to food

If food tastes too sweet - dilute sweet drinks, eat veggies instead of fruit, add a little salt or lemon juice, sip and hold herbal tea in your mouth for a moment before you eat (results in taste buds being less sensitive to sweet)

Dry mouth

- + Dry mouth may occur due to various treatments (radiation)
- + Is caused by less saliva in your mouth
- + Saliva is important for breaking down foods, prevent tooth decay, cleaning teeth and gums
- + Try these tips to help with dry mouth
 - + Take sips of fluids throughout the day and between bites of food
 - + Suck on ice chips, sugarless hard candy or chew on sugarless gum
 - + Avoid drinks with caffeine, lots of sugar, or acid (can dry out the mouth and cause tooth decay)
 - + Avoid alcohol
 - + Rinse your mouth with water (can also add a couple shakes of salt and baking soda) before and after eating
 - + Add moisture to solid foods by adding sauces, gravy, cream, butter, soup, or broth
 - + Avoid foods that are dry and break down into little pieces in the mouth (muffins, crackers, rice)
 - + Blend foods into purees
 - + If thicker liquids are hard to swallow, dilute them

Mouth sores

May be located on the inside of the mouth, gums, cheeks, tongue, roof or floor of the mouth, throat, or lips. Can make it hard to eat, drink, talk, swallow, and breathe

Are usually caused by different treatments and can make it difficult to eat, drink, swallow, talk or breathe

Although you can't prevent mouth sores, you can reduce your risk and utilize treatments that help control the pain as they heal

Make sure you are keeping your mouth as healthy as possible by getting a dental check up, developing a mouth care routine, stop smoking or using tobacco products, eating a diet with lots of fruits and vegetables

Work with your healthcare team to treat the pain including coating agents, topical pain killers, medicines to lower your risks of mouth sores, using ice or water to keep your mouth cold during certain types of chemotherapy

If you have mouth sores - avoid painful foods, eat small meals more frequently, use straws, puree foods, avoid alcohol, and rinse your mouth often

Fatigue – the most common side effect of cancer treatment

- + Defined as tiredness, exhaustion, or general lack of energy
- + Can make it harder to complete everyday tasks, get of bed, prepare and eat meals
- + Best treatment to improve fatigue is getting some physical activity, eating nutritious meals, staying hydrated, sleep hygiene, and managing stress and emotions by talking with a counsellor
- + Try
 - + eating small meals and snacks through out the day
 - + eat when you have the most energy
 - + meditate or try relaxation exercises; walk outside or around a track
 - + cook in batches when your have more energy
 - + try smoothie or liquid supplementation when you don't have the energy to eat
 - + Ask for help - friends or family can help with meals, shopping, housecleaning
 - + Make your bedroom your sleep sanctuary

Nutritional myths about cancer

Sugar feeds cancer

Cleanses help rid my body of cancer

A raw food diet prevents/cures cancer

Soy must be avoided after a breast cancer diagnosis

Intravenous vitamin C supplements slow cancer growth

Is soy safe?

- + Soy foods are safe for patients with cancer
- + Great alternative to animal protein.
- + There are many ways to eat soy. Each one has a different impact on your health
- + Soy contains phytoestrogens - this is different from human estrogen
- + Also contains isoflavones which may restore tumor suppression of BRCA genes

Does sugar make cancer grow – This is complex

- + Sugar is a type of carbohydrate that is naturally occurring in fruits, veggies, whole grains, beans, lentils and some dairy products
 - + There is natural sugars (from non processed foods) or added sugars (from sugar drinks, baked goods, desserts)
- + Sugar is not a carcinogen, nor does it cause cancer cells to grow
- + Sugar, in the form of glucose, is the body's main source of energy for our brain and every cell in the body, even cancer cells

Even if you avoiding sugar your body will continue to make glucose when it needs to.

- + If your blood sugar/glucose levels are consistently low your body will be forced to make surgery to get energy
 - + The body can make glucose from protein, fats and other carbs
 - + Your body will begin to break down muscle and fat
 - + This can cause a loss of weight, strength, energy, and immunity
 - + The loss of muscle/fat/weight can delay treatment and slow recovery



What should we know about sugar

- + There is an indirect link that eating too much sugar can over time lead to increases in body fat
- + Increases in body fat can increase your risk of many types of cancer
- + It is best to limit **added** sugars to our diet as they can lead to high sugar/glucose blood levels, unhealthy weight gain, and poor nutrition
- + Sugars for our body should come from vegetables, fruits, whole grains, beans, and lentils. Not only do these foods provide natural sugars they also have vitamins and minerals
 - + Read food labels to identify "added sugars"
 - + Limit beverages with large amounts of added sugars
 - + Limit processed foods
 - + Enjoy desserts and sugary treats in moderation

Cooking Your Foods

Although barbequing may seem like a healthy choice research has demonstrated that cooking meats at high temperatures, frying and broiling included, creates chemicals that may increase the risk of cancer.

To reduce your risk of forming these chemicals:

1. marinate your meat in a strong acid prior to cooking it
2. Try slower cooking methods such as boiling, braising, stewing, steaming or roasting
3. Trim off excess fat; reducing the smoke created by burning fat
4. BBQ slowly on a low heat, avoid flames which may cause charring
5. Try grilling vegetables and fruits which do not form the cancer-causing substances

(Monthly Tips to Reduce Your Risk; Canadian Cancer Society, 2013); (Eat Well, Be Active; Canadian Cancer Society, 2004)

What to avoid during cancer treatments

Limiting your diet – unless recommended by a dietician or doctor, limiting your food choices can be harmful during cancer treatments.

Certain foods however put you at a greater risk of food poisoning. Cancer and its treatments weaken your immune system which makes it harder for your body to fight bacteria found in food

- + Raw meat, eggs, fish, poultry and seafood
 - + Sometimes raw produce should also be avoided
- + Limit salty foods
- + Avoid processed meats
- + Limit intake of red meat
- + Unpasteurized products
- + Unwashed produce
- + Foods that may aggravated cancer treatment side effects
 - + This may include hot, spicy, or acidic food
- + Don't smoke and limit your alcohol intake
 - + Smoking can reduce your appetite
 - + Alcohol can increase your risk of cancer plus it is empty calories may fill you up but don't provide any nutritional value

Food and drinks that may put you at risk for food poisoning

Home-canned vegetables, fruit, and meat

Homemade eggnog or Caesar salad dressing

Raw vegetable sprouts (alfalfa/bean/broccoli)

Soft or moldy cheese

Cream or custard desserts stored at room temperature

Foods from buffets, salad bars, bulk bins, street fairs, or sidewalk vendors

Ice cream or frozen yogurt from soft-serve machines

Water from lakes, rivers, streams or springs

Well water unless tested yearly and found safe

Can eating well reduce the risk of cancer recurring?

- + Recurrence of cancer or cancer developing in another part of the body is influenced by:
 - + The type of cancer
 - + The stage of cancer when it was first diagnosed
 - + Your age when you were first diagnosed
- + What research tells us though is that if you have cancer you should try to follow the same cancer prevention recommendations as people who have not had cancer

Cancer prevention recommendations

- + Eat lots of vegetables, fruits, and fibre
 - + Most people are only getting about half the fibre we need.
 - + Fibre is found in fruits, vegetable, and whole grains. Follow the Canadian Food Guide when making your plate
- + Have no more than 3 servings of red meat a week
- + Avoid processed meat
- + Limit foods with added sugar
- + Limit alcohol
- + Stay physically active
- + Avoid excess body weight
- + Avoid all tobacco use

Resources available for you

- + Power of Nutrition During Cancer Treatment - Register at the Cancer Patient and Family Education website
- + Nutrition Myths and Cancer - Register at the Cancer Patient and Family Education website
- + Nutrition Education- Find nutrition information that is right for you (search under topic Cancer) [Nutrition Education | Alberta Health Services](#)