

Caregiver Support

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 trouble 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 for Caregivers

- Above all, try to make eating a pleasant time.
- 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 6 to 8 snacks or small meals per day instead of 3 larger meals. Small meals are often better tolerated than big ones.
- Take advantage of times when your loved one feels hungry. Have snacks readily available since the hunger may last only a few minutes.
- Stock up on high-calorie, high-protein nutritional supplements. These are available in liquid drinks, powders, bars, and puddings.
- High-calorie, high-protein nutritional drinks also come in clear options, which may be more tasty than creamy drinks.

Tips to Increase Calories

Try these tips to boost the calories in foods and meal served:

- Add butter or oil to bread, potatoes, vegetables, or soup.
- Use generous amounts of mayonnaise, salad dressing, and nut butters.
- Choose higher calorie drinks, such as whole milk, 100% juice, flavored milk, or ready-made smoothie beverages or high-calorie, high-protein nutritional drinks.
- Make shakes with whole milk, ice cream, sorbet, or sherbet. Add avocado, fruit, peanut butter, chocolate, or cream or half-and-half for extra calories and flavor.

Tips to Increase Protein

Try these tips to boost the protein in foods and meal served:

- Keep hard-boiled eggs in the refrigerator. Use them to make egg salad or add them to salads, casseroles, soups, or vegetable dishes.
- Add grated, sliced, or shredded cheese to potatoes, soups, or sandwiches.
- Cottage cheese, Greek yogurt, and nut butters are all high in protein.
- Use fortified milk in place of regular milk as it is higher in protein and calories.
 - To make fortified milk, blend 4 cups of whole milk with 1 cup of fat-free dry milk powder. Chill before serving.

Additional Support for Caregivers

If you have more concerns related to cancer and nutrition for your loved one, make an appointment with a registered dietitian nutritionist (RDN). An RDN can help you learn ways to prevent or stop cancer-related weight loss and provide tips for dealing with nutrition-related side effects of cancer. The RDN may also evaluate the patient's diet, offer information on dietary supplements, and suggest recipes you can try.

