What can cause a poor appetite?
A poor appetite may be caused by a number of things, including low mood, worry and stress. Medications may also lead to poor appetite. This does not mean patients should stop their medication, but will need to be extra careful to ensure they make good food choices.

Why is nutrition important for my patient at this time?
Whilst your patient may not feel hungry their body still needs nourishment. This is to keep their immune system strong and to prevent weight loss.

What might I see?
You may notice your patient is not eating much or they may tell you that they are not feeling well, but often you won’t see this.

Other tell-tale signs of a poor appetite are:
- Weight loss
- Irregular eating patterns
- Tiredness
- Food stacking up or going off in the cupboard/fridge/freezer

These signs may also indicate a lack of confidence or skills in shopping or cooking or a lack of cooking equipment. (See relevant NSAPs for more ideas)

Actions for case manager/key worker
- Your patient may find small, frequent meals are better tolerated. Encourage them to have something (small) to eat every two hours during the day. There may be times of the day when your patient feels more like eating. Get them to take advantage of this by encouraging them to eat well at these times.
- Encourage your patient to treat themselves to their favourite foods.
- Encourage your patient to have a range of ready prepared foods and snacks on hand, for times when they don’t feel like preparing food, for example soups, frozen or tinned foods, dried fruit, nuts, cheese & biscuits, yoghurts and custards.
- Encourage your patient to cook larger quantities in advance and store in the freezer. Encourage good food hygiene.
- Fluids at meal times can tend to fill people up. If this is causing your patient to eat smaller portions, recommend drinking fluids after and between meals.
- Recommend they avoid drinking low calorie drinks such as diet soft drink, tea, coffee, & clear soups. Instead, recommend fluids that are high in energy and protein such as milk, milkshakes or commercial supplements.
- Encourage your patient to increase the energy content of fluids they drink by adding skim milk powder, yoghurt or ice cream.
- Gentle physical activity can stimulate appetite. For example, taking a short walk around the block or even around the back yard. Encourage your patient to do this, if possible.
- Encourage your patient to enjoy meals as a social occasion – get them to eat with family and friends where possible and present food in an attractive manner.

You could also assess your patient’s nutritional status. Ask them the following questions and if they score a total of 2 or more refer them to a dietitian.

1. Have you lost weight recently without trying? No 0 (circle the answers
   Unsure 2
   1-5kg 1 for each
   6-10kg 2 question &
   11-15kg 3 add for a
   >15kg 4 total score)
   Unsure 2

2. If yes, how much weight have you lost (kg)?

3. Have you been eating poorly because of a decreased appetite?

   Total Score: (if >2 refer to a dietitian)

Need more information?
Refer you patient to your health service’s dietitian or an Accredited Practising Dietitian (APD)
www.daa.asn.au Find a Dietitian’