

## Loss of Appetite

Changes in appetite can be quite normal. Loss of appetite may be seen with illness, medical treatment, medication, anxiety, fatigue, pain or depression.

Even though you may not feel hungry, your body still needs nourishment to maintain your weight and support your recovery. Think of food as a fuel for your body or as a medicine as part of your treatment.

### Tips to help when your appetite is poor:

- Have 6 smaller meals/snacks across the day instead of 3 larger meals.
- Don't wait until you feel hungry to eat. Try to eat by the clock i.e. every 2 hours during the day.
- Try not to skip or miss meals, as not eating can make you feel more unwell.
- If your appetite is better at certain times of the day, plan larger meals at these times and small snacks at other times.
- Relax dietary restrictions – during times of illness it is more important to eat enough to maintain your weight and energy levels, rather than avoid all fats and sugars.
- Eat your favourite foods at any time of the day (e.g. breakfast foods at dinner).
- Enjoy meals with family and friends where possible and present food in an attractive manner.
- You may find softer foods which require less chewing easier to eat.
- Maximise the nutrients in each mouthful by adding high energy and protein sources to each meal and snack i.e. add cream, butter, milk, milk powder, oil or cream-based salad dressings.
- Try new foods and experiment with different colours, flavours, smells and textures as this may increase your interest in food.

- Have a range of ready-prepared meals and snacks on hand for times when you don't feel like preparing food, e.g. soups, frozen meals, nuts, dairy desserts, cheese, crackers, dip.
- Cook larger quantities of meals, like casseroles, soups and baked desserts in advance and store as individual serves in the freezer.
- Allow family and friends to assist with food shopping and cooking
- If you don't feel like eating, have a drink which is high in energy and protein. E.g. choose milk, or milk based drinks such as milkshakes or smoothies, or commercial supplements such as 'Sustagen' or 'Ensure'.
- Choose these nourishing drinks in preference to water, tea and coffee.
- Plan ahead and take snacks with you if out for the day.
- Serve food on a small plate as a large full plate may be overwhelming. You can always have seconds!
- Try drinking fluids in between meals as having fluids with your meals can fill you up
- Gentle physical activity can stimulate appetite. Try taking a short walk around your house or the block.
- Ensure your mouth feels fresh and clean before eating.

**If pain or nausea is causing your loss of appetite, talk to your doctor. Medications are often helpful.**

**If you notice you are losing weight, talk to your Dietitian for further advice.**

**Reference:** (Text adapted from)

*The New South Wales Cancer Council 'Cancer treatment and loss of appetite'*

*The Queensland Cancer Council "Side effects of cancer treatment"*

*The Leukaemia Foundation "Eating well – a practical guide for people living with leukaemias, lymphomas, myelomas and related blood disorders"*