

Loss of Appetite

Changes in appetite can be quite normal. Loss of appetite sometimes occurs with illness. It can be due to medical treatment, medications, anxiety, fatigue, pain or depression.

While you may not feel hungry, you still need nutrition to maintain your weight and keep you strong. 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.
- Plan larger meals for times when your appetite is a little better. Have small snacks at other times when you don't feel as hungry.
- Try not to restrict your diet. It is more important to maintain your weight and energy levels – you don't need to 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. It can also help to make your food look attractive on the plate.
- You may find softer foods that need less chewing easier to eat.

- Cook larger quantities of meals and store as single serves in the freezer. Good options are casseroles, soups and baked desserts.
- Maximise the nutrients in each mouthful – add high energy and protein sources to foods. Try adding cream, butter, milk, milk powder, oil or cream-based salad dressings.

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.

- Try new foods. Different colours, flavours, smells and textures may increase your interest in food.
- Have ready-prepared meals and snacks on hand for times when you don't feel like preparing food. Good options are soups, frozen meals, nuts, dairy desserts, cheese, crackers and dip.
- Plan ahead and take snacks with you if you are out for the day.
- Allow family and friends to assist with food shopping and cooking.
- Serve food on a small plate as a large full plate may be overwhelming. You can always have seconds!
- If you don't feel like eating, have a drink which is high in energy and protein. Try milk, milkshakes, smoothies, or commercial supplements such as 'Sustagen' or 'Ensure'. Choose these nourishing drinks in preference to water, tea and coffee.
- Try drinking fluids between meals, as having fluids with your meals can fill you up.
- Ensure your mouth feels fresh and clean before eating.
- Gentle physical activity can stimulate appetite. Try taking a short walk around your house or the block.