Eating advice during radiotherapy

This leaflet provides information on what to expect during radiotherapy. It gives tips to help you to manage any side effects from treatment. You will receive advice from a dietitian during your treatment if required.

During radiation your body needs more energy and protein than usual. The goal during treatment is to MAINTAIN your weight and meet your energy and protein needs. The benefits of maintaining weight include:

- A healthy immune system
- Helps your recovery
- Reduces hospital admission due to malnutrition and dehydration
- Assists to strength and energy levels

Record your weight weekly and see your nurse or dietitian if you are losing weight.

If you are eating less, maintain your weight by:
- Eating smaller, more frequent meals
- Aim for 6 small meals per day
- Making every mouthful count
- Eating snacks high in energy and protein

Your Dietitian can advise you on food choices to suit your needs. Some ideas are shown in the table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Simple ways to add energy and protein</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Drink nourishing fluids</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Flavoured milk/plain milk</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Add cream/ice-cream to milkshakes</td>
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<td>- Nutrition Supplements (e.g. Sustagen/Ensure)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Enrich meals</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Cook in butter or oil</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Add cheese/cream to meals</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Use sauces/gravies</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Add butter/margarine</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Enrich milk with milk powder</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Smart snacking</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>- Spread bread/biscuits with dips, cheese or nut spreads</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Yoghurt/dairy desserts</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Egg/ham/cheese sandwiches</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Pancakes with jam/cream</td>
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<td>- Boiled eggs</td>
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Food Preparation Hints

If you will be staying away from home during treatment, consider what kitchen facilities will be available.

- A simple hand held blender can be very useful for making milkshakes and smoothies or for pureeing food.
- Consider easy to prepare meals, convenience foods or frozen meals if you do not feel like cooking or do not have access to a good kitchen.
**Side Effects**
Side effects from radiation may be general (e.g. poor appetite or fatigue) or relate to the area of your body being treated.

**Diarrhoea**
- Drink fluids (Avoid alcohol & coffee)
- Use medications as directed
- Greasy, fried or spicy foods, caffeine and alcohol might make your diarrhoea worse

**Nausea**
- Eat small, frequent meals
- Eat room temperature or cold foods
- Dry or salty foods may be better tolerated
- Avoid cooking smells
- Try ginger containing food or fluids
- Use medications as directed

**Poor Appetite**
- Eat small, frequent meals
- Don’t wait until you are hungry to eat or drink
- Treat yourself to your favourite foods
- Include nourishing food and fluids, or enrich food (see page 1)

**Taste Changes**
- Use herbs (e.g. basil/thyme), mature cheese, bacon or onion to add flavour
- Add sauces or marinades to meals

**Sore mouth or ulcers or pain during/after swallowing**
- Continue regular mouth cares
- Try a straw with fluids if you have mouth ulcers
- Soft moist foods with extra sauces may help
- Avoid salty, spicy, or acidic foods
- Avoid very hot or very cold foods
- Take pain relief medication as prescribed
- If you have difficulty swallowing or are coughing or choking, ask to be referred to a Speech Pathologist

**Pain Control**
Pain can mean that you won’t want to eat as much. It is important to discuss pain with your doctor so that medication can be given. If you are finding it hard to drink fluids see a doctor *immediately* to avoid becoming dehydrated. Make sure you take your pain relief medication as prescribed.