

Nutrition

Nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, loss of appetite, and weight loss are all common side effects of oncology therapy. Eating healthy while on therapy is very important, but you may find it difficult to eat. Avoid eating fast food, stop drinking alcohol, and don't eat sweets unless you are trying to gain weight. If you don't have the energy to cook, ask someone to help you prepare meals and freeze portions for later use.

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Nausea

The American Cancer Society recommends the following for nausea:

- > Avoid acidic, spicy, sweet, and greasy foods.
- > Try eating 4 to 6 small meals a day.
- > Drink cool, clear beverages, such as water with a slice of citrus fruit.
- > Don't drink alcoholic beverages, and limit your intake of caffeinated drinks.
- > Try flat ginger ale.
- > If nausea is a problem in the morning, try eating dry foods, such as toast or crackers.
- > Avoid unpleasant sights, tastes, and smells. Grill outdoors to minimize odors.
- > Try eating food cold or at room temperature.
- > Rest in a chair after eating, but don't lie down for at least 2 hours.
- > Wear loose-fitting clothes.

Taste Alterations

Food sometimes tastes slightly different for patients on therapy. Try these tips:

- > Use plastic utensils instead of metal.
- > Eat and drink slowly to give your body time to digest.
- > Use a fan or keep a window open to minimize odors.
- > Avoid sweet, fried, or fatty foods.
- > Drink fruit juices or other liquids one half hour before meals.
- > Try eating foods cold or at room temperature.
- > Try hard sour candies, mints, dark chocolate, citrus sorbet, or chewing gum.

This information is not intended as a substitute for professional medical advice. Consult your health care provider for individualized information about your therapy. Your health care provider should be your primary source of information about your medical condition and treatment.

Weight Loss

Most weight loss usually occurs during the first 2 to 3 months of therapy, and should taper off. If you are losing too much too fast, or continue to lose weight:

- > Exercise just before you eat.
- > Try prepared meals or juice-based, high-caloric oral supplements.
- > Get enough protein: try chicken, fish, beans, or peanut butter if red meat tastes bitter.
- > Diet supplements that are lactose-based are not as good as fruit-based; but if you prefer the taste, take full strength or dilute with skimmed milk if the drink is too rich.
- > Eat foods you like, and keep these foods available for snacks.
- > Eat when you can, whenever you're hungry.
- > Instead of water, drink fruit juices, sports drinks, and carbonated beverages with calories. Do not drink coffee, tea, or diet beverages.

Use Your Head: Eat Well

This may be one of the most important times of your life to really think about nutrition. Now is the time to get good food into your body and get into healthy eating habits that will last.

- > Avoid fast food because of the grease and calories.
- > Avoid "empty" calories—cakes, cookies, and candies—unless you're losing weight and need those extra calories.
- > Do not drink alcohol.
- > If you don't have the energy to shop and cook, ask someone to help you so you have the food and meals you need to eat right.

Talk to Your Doctor

- > If you have lost 5 pounds or more, tell your doctor—you may need to be on a high-calorie diet or lower therapeutic dose.
- > Keep a food diary and keep track of your weight.
- > If you are losing weight due to nausea and vomiting or diarrhea, mention this to your doctor; there are medicines to help these symptoms.
- > Ask your doctor if you should take a multivitamin or other supplement.
- > Consider speaking to a dietitian or nutritionist.