

Appetite Changes

Cancer and its treatment can cause changes in your eating habits and your desire to eat. Not eating can lead to weight loss, and this can cause weakness and [fatigue](#). Eating as well as you can is an important part of taking care of yourself. Treatment-related side effects like [pain](#), [nausea](#), and [constipation](#) can also cause loss of appetite.

A person with a poor appetite or no appetite may eat much less than normal or may not eat at all. A poor appetite can be caused by a changed sense of taste or smell, feeling full, tumor growth, [dehydration](#), or the side effects of treatment. A poor appetite can be made worse by many things, such as [trouble swallowing](#), [depression](#), [pain](#), [nausea](#), or [vomiting](#).

What to look for

- Little or no interest in food
- Refusing to eat favorite foods
- [Weight changes](#)

What the patient can do

- Eat several snacks throughout the day, rather than 3 large meals.
- Avoid drinking liquids with meals or take only small sips of liquids to keep from feeling full early (unless you need liquids to help swallow or for dry mouth). Drink most of your liquids between meals.
- Make eating more enjoyable by setting the table with pretty dishes, playing your favorite music, watching TV, or eating with someone.
- Be as physically active as you can. Start off slowly and increase your activity over time as you feel stronger. Sometimes a short walk an hour or so before meals can help you feel hungry.
- Keep high-calorie, high-protein snacks on hand. Try hard-cooked eggs, peanut butter, cheese, ice cream, granola bars, liquid nutritional supplements, puddings, nuts, canned tuna or chicken, or trail mix.
- Review the tips on adding calories and protein to foods and include these in meals and snacks throughout the day.
- Eat your favorite foods any time of the day; for instance, if you like breakfast foods, eat them for dinner.

Call the cancer team if the patient:

- Feels nauseated and cannot eat for a day or more
- Loses 3 pounds or more
- Has pain when eating
- Does not urinate for an entire day or does not move bowels for 2 days or more
- Does not urinate often, and when they do, it comes out in small amounts, smells strong, or is dark colored
- Vomits for more than 24 hours
- Is unable to drink or keep down liquids
- Has pain that is not controlled

This information is not intended to replace advice given to you by your health care provider. Make sure you discuss any questions you have with your health care provider.