

How to Manage your Loss of Appetite

What is cancer-related loss of appetite?

Loss of appetite is when you do not have feelings of hunger or interest in food. If you are not able to eat, you may lose weight and may not be strong enough for your treatments.

What causes cancer-related loss of appetite?

- Cancer itself
- Depression or anxiety
- Side effects from treatment, like nausea and vomiting
- Being put off by the smells of cooking and food
- Medications
- Constipation and diarrhea
- Pain
- Fatigue



What can I do if I do not feel like eating?

Ask for a referral to a registered dietitian

Ask for a referral to a registered dietitian. A dietitian can help you make a plan to eat and drink when you have no appetite. You can also visit EatRightOntario.ca or call 1-877-510-5102 to connect with a registered dietitian for free.

Make every bite count

You need to get enough calories, protein, and liquids in your diet to keep up your strength and keep going with your treatments.

- Eat and drink more often
- Choose higher calorie foods
- Choose food and drinks that are high in protein. Protein helps your body heal when you are going through cancer treatments.
- Add more fat to your food (e.g. nuts, avocado, butter, mayonnaise, cream, full fat cheese)
- Drink at least 6-8 cups of liquids each day. Keep a water bottle with you, and fill it with your favourite drink. Limit drinks with caffeine (cola, coffee, tea) and alcohol.
- Eat whatever appeals to you

Eat convenience foods if you have trouble preparing meals (e.g. pre-cut vegetables and fruit, frozen chicken fingers, deli meats, salads). You may also want to contact your local community meal service program (like Meals on Wheels).

Be active and exercise

Exercise can help boost your appetite when you do not feel like eating. Even small amounts of exercise can help. Try to get up and do something every day. Choose an activity you like and go at your own pace.

Get help from family and friends

Accept help from family and friends who offer to cook or shop for you – they may be looking for ways to help. Tell them which foods you like and are able to eat.

Medications might help your appetite

Even after improving all the things that can be treated, you may still not have much of an appetite. Sometimes appetite stimulation medications might help. Speak with your doctor and health care team for more information.

When should I talk to my health care team?

Tell your health care team right away if you:

- Have nausea and/or vomiting that does not get better
- Cannot eat for a day or more
- Have pain when eating
- Cannot pee for an entire day
- Have not had a bowel movement (gone poo) for more than 2 days

You may need help with your loss of appetite if:

- You do not feel hungry, even if you have not eaten in several hours or even days
- You are losing weight and notice a loss of muscle and strength
- Your loss of appetite is causing you to worry or stress
- You need help making a plan to eat more



For more information, talk to your health care team or visit www.cancercare.on.ca/symptoms



Information adapted from Cancer Care Ontario's How to Manage Your Symptoms - patient guides.

This is information only and does not replace medical advice. Always ask your health care provider if you have any questions or concerns.