

Diet & Nutrition During Treatment

Eating well during treatment

Eating well has never been more important than it is right now. When you are going through treatment for breast cancer, good nutrition will:

- help keep you strong
- help your body rebuild tissue that has been damaged by treatment
- help your body deal with the side effects of treatment
- help your body fight off infection

Be sure to eat foods from all the food groups: breads and grains, fruits, vegetables, meats and dairy. You may even need to eat more high-protein foods during treatment. High-protein foods and enough calories

will give your body the energy it needs to keep up with your treatment plan.

Just as every person responds a little differently to cancer treatment, people also respond differently to the foods they eat. Ask your doctor to refer you to a registered dietitian (RD) who can help you choose the right foods for your unique needs if you are having trouble eating.



A word about... weight changes

Some people going through treatment for breast cancer will have weight changes. Weight gain may be due to fluid retention and/or increased appetite caused by some cancer medications or the onset of menopause. Weight loss may be a result of poor appetite due to the side effects of treatment. It is important to try to maintain your normal body weight with proper diet and exercise. Tell your doctor or a registered dietitian (RD) if you notice a weight gain or loss of five pounds or more in one month. They will look into what is causing this change and give you advice for your individual needs.

A word about... nutrition supplements

Contrary to popular belief, most women going through treatment for breast cancer do not need to take a nutrition supplement. You can usually get what you need by making a few changes to what you eat. If you are having trouble eating, check with your doctor or RD. They can give you tips on adding more protein or calories to your diet. Talk to your doctor before adding supplements to your diet. Some may interfere with your treatment.

Common concerns

Treatment may cause side effects that can directly impact your diet. *If you have any of the side effects listed below, be sure to tell your doctor and RD.*

Following the tips listed under each side effect will also help.

Side effects related to your diet

I don't feel like eating.

- Eat smaller meals more often throughout the day.
- Eat whatever sounds good to you, even if it is not the most healthy.

Foods just don't taste or smell the same.

- Try foods that are tart, like lemon pudding, or try stronger seasonings, like oregano and rosemary.
- Avoid strong smelling meat, such as beef. Try chicken, turkey or eggs.

My mouth and throat are very sore.

- Eat softer foods such as mashed potatoes, macaroni and cheese, milkshakes, pudding or applesauce.
- Eat foods at room temperature. Foods that are too hot can make your sore mouth feel worse.

My mouth is really dry.

- Suck on hard candy and eat popsicles or fruit juice bars. They help produce more saliva.
- Add gravy, broth and sauces to your foods to make them more moist.

Diarrhea has become a problem for me.

- Make sure you get plenty of fluid throughout the day. Water, broth and grape juice are good choices.
- Eat foods low in fiber such as rice, pasta, cottage cheese, yogurt, white bread and smooth peanut butter.



Eat whatever sounds good to you, even if it is not the most healthy.

What will help me with constipation?

- Make sure you get plenty of fluid every day.
- Eat high-fiber foods such as whole grain breads, fresh fruits and vegetables, brown rice and dried beans.

I'm always so nauseated and feel like I have to vomit.

- Ask your doctor about drugs called antiemetics [an-tee-eh-MET-iks]. They can help control nausea and vomiting.
- Eat more bland foods such as toast, crackers, oatmeal and clear liquids. Avoid greasy and spicy foods.

Resource

Organization

National Cancer Institute

Eating Hints

www.cancer.gov/cancerinfo/eatinghints

Related fact sheets in this series:

- Chemotherapy — Coping With Side Effects
- Complementary Therapies
- Radiation Therapy — Coping With Side Effects

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