



## Eating and drinking during treatment

**Aggressive cancer treatments can be very challenging. They affect not only your appetite but also your ability to eat and drink normally, your sense of smell and taste, your moods and your energy levels.**

When you are going through chemotherapy and radiotherapy, it can be much more difficult to think about shopping for fresh foods and planning your meals. You might not feel like eating and drinking very much, but this is probably the most important time to pay close attention to maintaining a balanced diet.

If you can eat well, your body will cope better and recover more quickly from the rigours of the treatments and their side effects. This may mean that you have to forget about regular planned meals at traditional, set times of the day and adopt more of a “grazing” approach to your food and fluid intake, with more of a “little and often” routine.

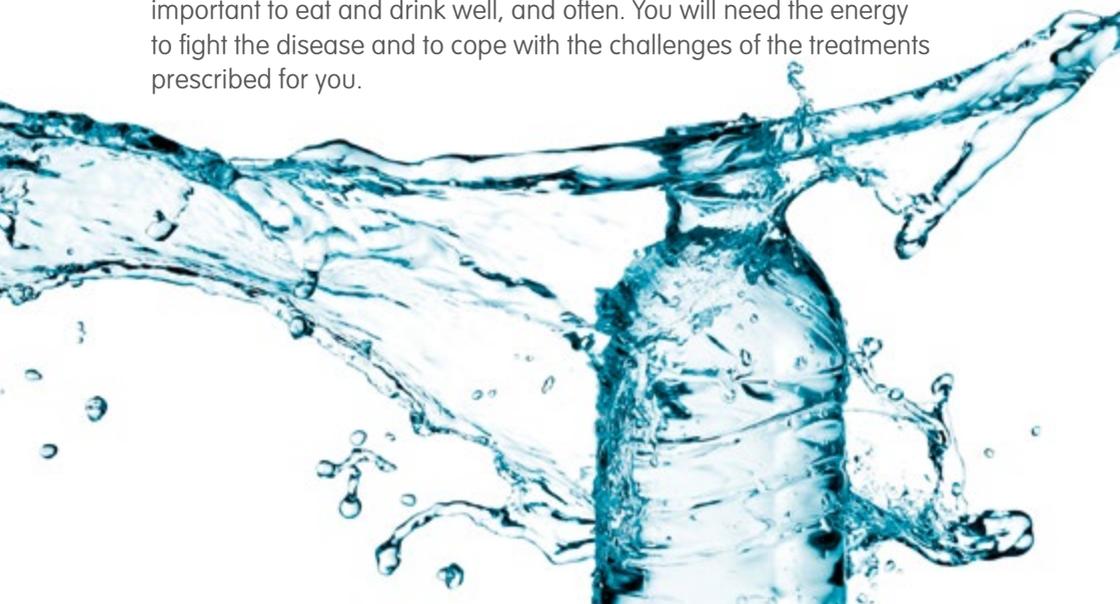
## What is a balanced diet for you?

During your treatment, a well-balanced diet will depend on your own personal circumstances. It is likely to change too, as you move through each step of your treatment plan, so be prepared to be flexible with your ideas about what is healthy, and what is “normal”. It is important to try to maintain your weight during treatment.

If you are underweight, this might mean eating more often or changing the types of food choices you are making so you can build up your muscles and replace some of the body fat you may have lost.

If you are overweight, it may mean that after treatment finishes you need to choose different foods with a lower total energy content which will allow you to continue to eat well and often, but won't encourage your body to store up excess energy as body fat.

During a cancer journey, and especially during treatment, it is very important to eat and drink well, and often. You will need the energy to fight the disease and to cope with the challenges of the treatments prescribed for you.



# During treatment

## Experiment with different tastes and consistencies

It is not uncommon to go off some foods, like tea and coffee, for example. Mild flavoured foods can taste bland; dry foods can feel like cardboard in your mouth; hot, spicy foods or very acidic foods can irritate your mouth, and cause other problems with indigestion or diarrhoea.

If this is the case for you then now is the time to experiment. Perhaps try some stronger flavours and foods with a softer texture which you may not have previously considered.

Some people find **ginger biscuits** and other foods containing ginger to be helpful if experiencing nausea.

## Ideas for when smaller portions are needed

If you are put off by large plates of food then stick to small portions in little bowls or on side plates or saucers that don't look so daunting.

You can also make your own "grazing box" with plastic food containers that have individual compartments for small portions of favourite snacks.

Include a variety of different choices. Experiment with **nuts and seeds, crackers, cubes of cheese, hummus and vegetable sticks, pitta bread fingers, olives, nut butters**, and portions of **dried fruits or fresh fruit slices** to help increase the range of foods you are eating.

Lunch-box portions of **fromage frais and yoghurt, fruit juices, smoothies and snacks** can be easy to manage if you have a small appetite and can't face cooking or preparing food.



# tips



## Other tips for maintaining a balanced diet

- 1** The emphasis during this part of your bowel cancer journey is to maintain your weight by eating enough and to stay well hydrated by drinking enough fluid, every day
- 2** If you can manage a well-balanced, varied diet that contains a wider variety of choices from all the wonderful colours, flavours and textures in all the different food groups, you are more likely to enjoy your food
- 3** Asking for, and accepting help from other people can make a big difference to your quality of life if you are unable to cope with shopping or cooking – or consider online ordering and delivery of groceries and meals if this is an option for you
- 4** Think about what you are going to eat before you start to feel hungry, and at times of the day when your appetite is usually at its best

## tips



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If you feel nauseous, don't allow cooking smells to travel through the house, and stay out of the kitchen if strong smelling foods make you feel sick

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Take a selection of small, tasty snacks and drinks if you have to go out, to keep your energy levels and avoid getting hungry or thirsty when you are away from home

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Encourage your family and friends to sit and eat with you, and to have the same menu – meal times are very important social occasions and are also an important part of feeling "normal" in your bowel cancer journey



## The key principles for a healthy balanced diet are:

- » **Drink fluids** regularly and avoid becoming dehydrated
- » Maintain a healthy body weight by eating only **as much food as you need**, every day
- » Choose from the **widest possible range of ingredients** for all the energy and essential nutrients your body needs
- » Choose fresh and frozen foods that are as close as possible to their **natural state**
- » **Avoid processed or refined foods** that contain high levels of artificial additives, hidden saturated fats, sugars and chemical preservatives



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