

Eating well during treatment

When you go through treatment for breast cancer, eating well can help your body:

- Stay strong
- Rebuild tissue damaged by treatment
- Deal with side effects of treatment
- Fight off infection

Be sure to eat a variety of foods: breads and grains, fruits, vegetables and dairy. You may need to eat more high-protein foods such as chicken, fish or beans during treatment. High-protein foods and plenty of calories will give your body the energy it needs to continue treatment.

Some people may have trouble eating during treatment. Ask your doctor to refer you to a registered dietitian (RD) or nutritionist who can help you if you are having trouble eating.



A word about... weight changes

Some people may have weight changes during treatment.

Weight gain may be due to fluid retention and/or increased appetite from some medications or the start of menopause. Weight loss may be from poor appetite due to the side effects of treatment or cancer itself. It is important to try to keep your normal body weight. You can do this with a healthy diet and exercise.

Tell your doctor if you have a weight gain (or loss) of 5 pounds or more in 1 month. He/she will look into what is causing this change and give you advice.

A word about... nutrition supplements

Most people who go through treatment for breast cancer do not need to take a nutrition (dietary) supplement. You can usually get what you need by making a few changes to your diet.

If you have trouble eating, check with your doctor or RD. They can give you tips on adding more protein or calories to your diet. Talk with your doctor before taking a nutrition supplement. Some may interfere with your treatment.

Common concerns

Treatment may cause side effects that can affect your diet. If you have any of the side effects listed below, be sure to tell your doctor or RD. The tips listed under each side effect may also help.

Side effects related to your diet

I don't feel like eating.

- Eat 4 to 6 small meals (instead of 3 large meals) each day.
- Eat whatever sounds good to you, even if it is not the healthiest choice.

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.
- Talk to your doctor about medications that can help.

My mouth is really dry.

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

Diarrhea has become a problem for me.

- Make sure you get plenty of fluid throughout the day. Water, broth and juice are good choices.
- Eat foods low in fiber such as pasta, cottage cheese, yogurt, white bread and smooth peanut butter. Your doctor may recommend the BRAT diet (bananas, rice, applesauce and toast).
- Cut down on dairy.
- Talk to your doctor about medications that can help.

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 beans.
- Take a stool softener.

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 prevent and control nausea and vomiting.
- Eat more bland foods such as toast, crackers, oatmeal and clear liquids.
- Avoid greasy and spicy foods.

Resources

Susan G. Komen®

1-877 GO KOMEN (1-877-465-6636)

www.komen.org

National Cancer Institute Eating Hints: Before, During and After Cancer Treatments

www.cancer.gov/cancerinfo/eatinghints

Our Message Boards offer online forums to share your thoughts or feelings about subjects related to breast cancer. Our Healthful Living forum within the Message Boards offers women ideas for nutritious living and ways to say physically active while dealing with breast cancer.

Related fact sheets in this series:

- Complementary and Integrative Therapies
- Making Breast Cancer Treatment Decisions

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