

Increasing Calories and Protein

Cancer and cancer treatment may lessen your appetite and interest in food. When your appetite is limited, make every bite count by eating foods that are good sources of calories and protein.

Meal Planning Tips

- Eat small meals every 2 to 3 hours to improve digestion and feel more comfortable.
- Drinking lots of fluids can fill up your stomach and decrease your appetite. Therefore, drink most fluids between meals instead of with meals. (It's fine to sip fluids to help swallow food at mealtimes.)
- Eat your favorite foods when you feel good! Keep a variety of choices on hand so you don't get tired of eating the same foods over and over.
- Enjoy breakfast-type foods around the clock. Eggs, pancakes, and waffles are usually easy to eat and can make great meals any time of the day.
- If your appetite is best in the morning, eat a large breakfast, a big lunch, and a smaller dinner.
- Eat leftovers or a nutritious snack in the middle of the afternoon.
- For extra calories and protein, try nutritional bars, puddings, and commercially prepared or homemade calorie-rich and protein-rich beverages that are the consistency and flavor of fruit juice.

High-Protein Food Choices

Good choices to add more protein to your meals and snacks include milk and dairy foods; eggs; meat, poultry, and fish; legumes (beans peas, and peanuts); nuts; and seeds. Here are some ideas to try.

Milk and Dairy Foods

- Eat cheese on toast or with crackers.
- Add grated cheddar cheese to baked potatoes, vegetables, soups, pasta, meat, or fruit.
- Use whole milk in place of water when making cereal and cream soups.
- Choose Greek yogurt, which is higher in protein than regular yogurt.
- Top vegetables and pasta with cream sauces.
- Add powdered milk to cream soups and mashed potatoes.

Eggs

- Keep hard-cooked eggs in the refrigerator. Eat them “as is”; use them to make a quick egg salad; or chop them and add them to salads, casseroles, soups, and vegetables.
- To avoid the risk of harmful bacteria in raw or undercooked eggs, eat only well-cooked eggs.

Meats, Poultry, and Fish

- Add leftover cooked meats to soups, casseroles, salads, and omelets.
- Mix diced and flaked meat with sour cream and spices to make a dip or sandwich spread.

Legumes (Beans, Peas, and Peanuts), Nuts, and Seeds

- Add beans and peas to salads, soups, casseroles, and vegetable dishes.
- Spread peanut butter on toast and fruit, or blend it in a milkshake.
- Sprinkle sunflower seeds or nuts on vegetables, salads, pasta, and desserts such as fruit, ice cream, pudding, and custard.
- Snack on seeds or nuts.

High-Calorie Food Choices

To add more calories to your meals and snacks, focus on high-calorie foods like milk and dairy foods; butter and margarine; calorie-rich condiments; and sweets.

Milk and Dairy Foods

- Whole milk and low-fat (2%) milk are higher in calories; choose them instead of fat-free (skim) milk.
- Add heavy (whipping) cream to desserts, pancakes, waffles, fruit, hot chocolate, soups, and casseroles.
- Add sour cream to baked potatoes and vegetables.
- Drink milkshakes or Carnation Instant Breakfast.

Butter, Margarine, and Condiments

- Melt butter or margarine over potatoes, rice, pasta, and cooked vegetables.
- Stir melted butter or margarine into soups and casseroles.
- Spread butter or margarine on bread for sandwiches.
- Use regular (not low-fat or reduced-fat) mayonnaise on sandwiches and in dips with vegetables and fruit.
- Top salads with regular salad dressing.

Sweets

- Add jelly or honey to bread and crackers.
- Top fruit, ice cream, and cake with fruit jam.

The Benefits of Physical Activity

Talk to your doctor about physical activity. Light or moderate physical activity may help stimulate your appetite and maintain muscle.

- If you are steady on your feet, walk in your neighborhood or at the local mall. Choose places that offer places to sit down and rest as needed.
- If you are unsteady on your feet, ask your doctor for a referral to a physical therapist who can show you bed and chair exercises.

Additional Resources

The National Cancer Institute (800/4CANCER) and the American Cancer Society (800/234-5ACS) offer free educational booklets with tips for increasing calories and other nutrients before, during, and after cancer therapy.