

New Connections

HELPING YOU CARE FOR A LOVED ONE DURING TREATMENT



Issue 21



Don't let side effects affect good nutrition.

Here are some problems that people with cancer sometimes encounter followed by some tips that may help:

Changes in Taste and Smell

- Use plastic flatware and glass cups and plates (for those who have a bitter or metallic taste in their mouths).
- Suck on sugar-free lemon drops, gum, or mints.
- Eat fresh or frozen fruits and vegetables instead of canned.
- Season foods with tart flavors, such as lemon juice, lemonade, citrus fruits, vinegar, and pickled foods. (If your loved one has a sore mouth or throat, do not use this tip.)
- Try flavoring foods with new tastes or spices, such as onion, garlic, chili powder, basil, oregano, rosemary, tarragon, barbecue sauce, mustard, ketchup, or mint.
- Counter a salty taste with added sweeteners, sweet taste with added lemon juice and salt, and bitter taste with added sweeteners.
- Rinse mouth with baking soda mouthwash before eating to help improve the taste of foods. (Mix one teaspoon salt and one teaspoon baking soda in one quart water. Shake well before swishing and spitting.)
- Keep mouth clean and brush teeth with a non-mint-flavored toothpaste to help ease bad tastes.
- Serve foods cold or at room temperature. This can reduce the taste and smell of foods, making them easier to tolerate for those who find that certain smells make them ill.
- Freeze fruits, such as cantaloupe, grapes, oranges, and watermelon, and eat them as frozen treats.
- Eat fresh vegetables. They may be more appealing than canned or frozen ones.
- Marinate meats to make them more tender and flavorful.
- If red meats taste strange, try other protein-rich foods, such as chicken, fish, eggs, or cheese.
- Using a blender or food processor, make shakes of fresh fruits, ice cream, milk or yogurt.
- If certain beverages smell unpleasant, cover them with a lid and drink them through a straw.

Sore Mouth or Throat

- Eat soft, bland foods.
- Lukewarm foods can be soothing.
- Avoid foods that are coarse, dry, or scratchy.
- Avoid tart, salty, or acidic fruits and juices; alcohol; and spicy foods.
- Sip cool shakes through a straw to ease throat pain.
- Mouth should be rinsed regularly with a salt solution (one teaspoon of baking soda and one teaspoon salt mixed in one quart water) to help prevent infections and improve healing.

Dry Mouth and Thick Saliva

- Drink eight to 10 cups of liquid a day, and take a water bottle with you when you leave home. (Drinking lots of fluids

helps thin mucus.)

- Use a straw to drink liquids.
- Take small bites and chew food well.
- Eat soft, moist foods that are cool or at room temperature. Try blenderized fruits and vegetables, soft-cooked chicken and fish, well-thinned cereals, popsicles, smoothies, and slushies. Avoid foods that stick to the roof of the mouth.
- Moisten foods with broth, soup, sauces, gravy, yogurt, or creams.
- Suck on sugarless candy or chew sugarless gum to stimulate saliva. Lemon drops often work well.
- Keep the mouth clean. Use a soft-bristle toothbrush; rinse mouth before and after meals with plain water or a mild mouth rinse (made with one quart water, one teaspoon salt, and one teaspoon baking soda); and floss regularly. It is also a good idea to gently brush tongue.
- Avoid commercial mouthwashes, alcoholic and acidic drinks, and tobacco.
- Limit drinks with caffeine, such as coffee, tea, colas, and chocolate.
- Use a cool mist humidifier to moisten room air, especially at night. (Be sure to keep the humidifier clean to avoid spreading bacteria or mold in the air.)
- Saliva substitutes are helpful if salivary glands have been removed by surgery or damaged by radiation therapy. These products add moisture to the mouth. Nutritional supplements, such as liquid meal replacements, may be helpful during this time.

Poor Appetite

- Eat small meals or snacks every one to two hours.
- Avoid liquids with meals or take only small sips of liquids to keep from feeling full early (unless liquids are needed to help swallow or for dry mouth). Drink most liquids between meals.
- Make eating more enjoyable by setting the table with pretty dishes, playing music, or dining with friends.
- Be as physically active as possible. Start off slowly and increase activity over time as strength returns.
- Keep high-calorie, high-protein snacks on hand. Try hard-cooked eggs, peanut butter, cheese, ice cream, granola bars, liquid nutritional supplements, puddings, nuts, canned tuna or chicken, or trail mix.
- Eat favorite foods anytime of the day; for example, if you like breakfast foods, you might try breakfast for dinner.
- Constipation is often a problem. Ask the doctor about medicines to help relieve it or any other side effects.

Diarrhea

- Drink plenty of mild, clear, noncarbonated liquids during the day. Drink liquids at room temperature. These may be better tolerated than very hot or cold beverages.
- Eat small, frequent meals and snacks during the day.
- Avoid greasy, fried, spicy, or very sweet foods.
- Limit milk or milk products to two cups a day. Yogurt and buttermilk are OK.
- Avoid drinks and foods that cause gas, such as carbonated drinks, gas-forming vegetables, and chewing gum. (Carbonated beverages are OK if they have been open for at least 10 minutes before drinking.)
- Drink and eat high-sodium foods, such as broths, soups, sports drinks, crackers, and pretzels.
- Drink and eat high-potassium foods, such as fruit juices and nectars, sports drinks, potatoes with the skin, and bananas.
- Increase soluble-fiber foods, such as applesauce, bananas, canned peaches and pears, oatmeal, and white rice.
- Avoid nonsoluble-fiber foods such as nuts, seeds, whole grains, legumes, dried fruits, and raw fruits and vegetables.
- Drink at least one cup of liquid after each loose bowel movement. Try water, sports drinks, or bouillon.
- Avoid chewing sugar-free gum and eating candies made with sugar alcohol (i.e., sorbitol, mannitol, or xylitol).
- If diarrhea continues or increases, or if stools have an unusual odor or color, call the doctor immediately.

Nausea and Vomiting

- Eat six to eight small meals a day, instead of three large meals.
- Eat dry foods, such as crackers, toast, dry cereals, or bread sticks at breakfast and every few hours during the day.
- Eat foods that do not have a strong odor.
- Eat cool foods instead of hot, spicy foods.
- Avoid foods that are overly sweet, greasy, fried, or spicy, such as rich desserts and French fries.
- Sit up or recline with head raised for at least one hour after eating.
- Sip clear liquids frequently to prevent dehydration. These include broth, sport drinks, water, juice, and popsicles. Eating gelatin may also help.
- Try bland, soft, easy-to-digest foods on scheduled treatment days. Foods such as Cream of Wheat and chicken noodle soup with saltine crackers may be easier to keep down than heavy meals.
- Avoid eating in a room that is warm, or that has cooking odors or other smells. Cook outside on the grill or use boiling bags to reduce cooking odors.
- Rinse your mouth with a baking soda and salt mouthwash before and after meals (one quart water, one teaspoon salt,

and one teaspoon baking soda mixed well before each use).

- Suck on hard candy, such as peppermint or lemon drops to counter bad tastes.
- If vomiting occurs regularly, rinse mouth after vomiting, wait 30 minutes, then try to sip a clear liquid such as apple juice, cranberry juice, flat soda, or broth. Small bites of popsicle may help, too.
- There are medicines that control nausea and vomiting very well. Ask your doctor about getting a prescription if these tips don't help.

Trouble Swallowing

- Ask your doctor about a referral to a speech therapist who can teach him or her how to swallow more easily and how to decrease coughing and choking while eating and drinking.
- Drink six to eight cups of fluid each day and thicken the fluid to the consistency that is easiest to swallow.
- Eat small meals frequently.
- Drink canned liquid nutritional supplements to be sure that calorie and protein needs are met.
- Chop or puree food in a blender or food processor.
- Use thickening products, such as gelatin. Mix 1 tablespoon of unflavored gelatin in 2 cups liquid until dissolved. Pour over food. Allow food to sit until saturated. Commercial thickeners are also available and are easy to use
- Use pureed vegetables and instant potatoes to thicken soups.
- Call the doctor immediately if coughing or choking occurs while eating, especially if fever is also present.

Click [here](#) for an easy recipe for food processor or blender cream soup base.

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