

Information Sheet:

Cancer Treatment & Loss of Appetite

Good nutrition is needed for general good health. During illness, it is important that you have a well balanced diet that includes proteins, fats, carbohydrates, vitamins and minerals, to maintain energy, and to keep your immune system strong.

Because of your illness or treatments, you may not be able to eat in the same way as before. Many problems such as pain, nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea or, a sore or dry mouth may make eating difficult and cause you to lose interest in eating.

Depression, stress and anxiety can also cause a loss of appetite.

How can I manage my loss of appetite?

You may like to eat by the clock rather than relying on hunger to prompt you to eat (i.e. eat at times that you have identified: 9am, 12midday, 3pm, etc).

- ❖ You may find small, frequent meals easier than large ones; aim for 6 per day.
- ❖ Nutritional supplements may be beneficial for you. Ask a dietician for samples so you can work out which ones you prefer before buying them. These are better served cold than at room temperature.
- ❖ If you find red meat unappealing, choose other high protein foods such as poultry, fish, eggs, bean curd, beans, peas, nuts or prepared vegetarian foods.
- ❖ Plan your meals in advance.
- ❖ Ask for help to prepare meals. A friend or relative is often happy to help out by preparing food for you.
- ❖ When you are feeling okay, prepare several portions of your favourite foods and freeze them. You can use these when you are not feeling well enough to prepare food.
- ❖ Make food good to look at: use colours and attractive garnishes.
- ❖ Avoid foods that have strong smells. If the smell of food does not agree with you, stay away from the kitchen until you are ready to eat.

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- ❖ Make your mealtime pleasant. Mealtime atmosphere is important to make you feel like eating. And it may be beneficial to eat with family and friends as you are more likely to eat better when socialising.
- ❖ If you don't feel like eating solid foods, try to have more fluids during the day. Juice, soup and other fluids like these can give you important calories and nutrients.
- ❖ Take advantage of the days when you are feeling well, and have larger meals then.
- ❖ Drinking may make you feel full, so sip only small amounts of fluid during meals.
- ❖ If it is okay with your doctor, have a small glass of wine or beer during the meal. It may help to stimulate your appetite.
- ❖ Regular exercise may also help your appetite.
- ❖ Always make sure that your mouth is fresh and clean before starting a meal.

Tell your Doctor or Nurse if:

- You are unable to drink fluids
- You are unable to eat solid foods
- You feel you are continuing to lose weight
- You feel dizzy when standing (you may be dehydrated)

We encourage you to speak with your healthcare team if you have any concerns about your loss of appetite.

We welcome feedback at:

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Bairnsdale Regional Health Service is located on the traditional land of the Gunai Kurnai people.

My team is **BRHS**