

Common Nutrition Problems of Oncology Patients

Below are some common problems we hear from oncology patients that affect their nutrition, along with some suggestions for how to manage them.

“I can’t stand the smell of food”

- Smells are stronger in hot foods. Choose cold or room temperature foods such as a cold sandwich, yogurt, cottage cheese, pasta salad, sliced cheese, or crackers.
- You may ask to have food trays left outside of your room to vent or air out smells before they’re delivered to your bedside.
- Use lids and straws when drinking nutrition shakes or other drinks.

“Nothing tastes good”

- Drink ginger ale or club soda before eating to clean your taste buds.
- Suck on a lemon drop, mint, or hard candy to get rid of unpleasant tastes in your mouth before trying to eat.
- If foods taste too sweet, try adding something sour to your food, like lemon juice or vinegar.
- Add different sauces, condiments, and gravies to your food to change the taste.

“I’m too tired to eat”

- Order snacks between meals or on your meal trays to save for later, so you can eat small amounts all day.
- Drink a nutrition shake between meals or to make up for missed meals.

- Keep shelf-stable foods (foods that won't go bad quickly, or foods you don't need to refrigerate) at your bedside so you have something to eat when you do feel more awake, or in case your meals are interrupted.

“I feel nauseated”

- Eat small amounts regularly throughout the day.
- Eat slowly, and try not to move around too much after eating.
- Drink less liquid during meals to avoid feeling full and bloated.
- Eat cold or room temperature foods.
- Avoid these foods:
 - Fatty, greasy, or fried foods like burgers, mac and cheese, or fast food
 - Very sweet foods like candy, cookies, or cake
 - Spicy or hot foods
 - Foods with strong smells
- Try these foods:
 - Ice chips, Gatorade®, broth, and Jell-O®
 - Yogurt and sherbet
 - Canned peaches or pears
 - Applesauce
 - Oatmeal or cream of wheat,
 - Dry cereal (like Rice Chex™ or corn flakes)
 - Toast, crackers, and pretzels
 - Skinless baked chicken breast and baked low-fat fish

“My mouth is so dry”

- Suck on hard candy, lozenges, or mints to help your mouth produce more saliva (spit).

- Keep your mouth moist (wet). You can do this by eating a popsicle, drinking sips of water between bites of foods during meals, and sipping on water throughout the day.
- Ask for extra sauce and gravy on your tray to make foods easier to swallow.

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