

Eating, appetite and taste

During cancer treatment, you may lose your appetite. This may be because you feel sick or tired, or because food and drink taste different. You may no longer enjoy certain foods or find that all foods taste the same. Food may taste very sweet or salty, or you may have a metallic taste in your mouth.

Tips for managing appetite and taste changes

- Instead of three big meals a day, try eating small, frequent meals or snacks. If you find certain times of the day are better for you to eat, make the most of these times. Keep snacks handy to eat whenever you can. Bags of nuts or crisps, dried fruit or cheese and crackers are quite light and tasty. Or try a yoghurt, peanut butter or fromage frais instead.
- Try to make your food look as attractive as possible. Put small portions on your plate and garnish the food with lemon, tomato or parsley. You could use a small plate to serve food on. Eat your meals slowly, chew the food well and relax for a little while after each meal.
- You may want to try stimulating your appetite with a small sherry or brandy half an hour before you eat. A glass of wine with meals may also help digestion. Check with your doctor that you can have alcohol.
- Sweet or savoury nourishing drinks can be used alongside small meals. These can be sipped slowly through the day.
- Sometimes the smell of cooking can be appetising, but occasionally it can put you off eating. Try to eat cold foods that do not need cooking or ready-made foods that can go straight in the oven. Everyone's appetite changes and you may have good and bad days. Make the most of the good days by eating well and treating yourself to your favourite foods.
- Try to eat your meals in a room where you feel relaxed and where there are no distractions.
- It may be possible to stimulate your appetite using medicines, such as a low dose of steroids or the hormone medroxyprogesterone. Your doctor may prescribe these for you.
- Use seasonings, spices and herbs such as pepper, cumin or rosemary to flavour your cooking. But if your mouth is sore, you may find that some spices and seasonings make it worse.
- Try marinating meat in fruit juices or wine, or cook it in strong sauces such as curry or sweet and sour. Sharp-tasting foods such as fresh fruit, fruit juices and sour or boiled sweets can be refreshing and leave a pleasant taste in your mouth. But be careful if your mouth is sore as these may feel painful to eat.
- If you no longer like tea or coffee, try lemon tea, or perhaps a cold fizzy drink such as lemonade.
- Some people find that cold foods taste better than hot foods. If your sense of taste or smell has changed, it can sometimes help to serve food at room temperature.
- Cold meats may taste better served with pickle or chutney. Serve fish, chicken and egg dishes with sauces.
- Use plastic cutlery if you notice a metallic taste in your mouth.

Local resources:

Resource	Contact details

National resources:

Resource	Contact details
British Dietetic Association (BDA)	www.bda.uk.com
CORE	www.corecharity.org.uk
Diabetes UK	www.diabetes.org.uk

Further information

- **MAC13613 Eating problems and cancer**
- **MAC13614 The building-up diet**
- **MAC13612 Healthy eating and cancer**
- **MAC15201 Recipes for people affected by cancer**
- **www.macmillan.org.uk/information-and-support/coping/side-effects-and-symptoms/eating-problems**

More information and support

More than one in three of us will get cancer. For most of us it will be the toughest fight we ever face. And the feelings of isolation and loneliness that so many people experience make it even harder. But you don't have to go through it alone. The Macmillan team is with you every step of the way.

Visit **macmillan.org.uk** or call us on **0808 808 00 00**, Monday to Friday, 9am to 8pm.

Hard of hearing? Use textphone **0808 808 0121**, or Text Relay. Speak another language? We have telephone interpreters. We provide information in a range of languages and formats. Visit **macmillan.org.uk/otherformats** or call us.

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