

# Eating, appetite and taste

This information is about [changes to your appetite and taste](#).

During cancer treatment, you may lose your appetite. This may be because you feel sick or tired, have a sore mouth, or because food and drink taste different. You may no longer enjoy certain foods.

You may find that all foods taste the same or that it tastes different. Food may taste very sweet or salty. Or you may have a metallic taste in your mouth or find that things taste 'like cardboard'.

If side effects of treatment are stopping you eating your normal diet, talk to your doctor or nurse.

## Tips for managing a poor appetite

- Have smaller meals more often, rather than 3 bigger meals. Use a smaller plate and make your food look attractive to eat. Eat at the times that work best for you, even if it is at different times to other people. Try to eat your meals in a room where you feel relaxed.
- Keep snacks handy between meals. These can include nuts, crisps, dried fruit, or cheese and crackers. If you need something softer, try yoghurt, peanut butter, fromage frais or fruit smoothies.
- You may find it easier to eat cold foods that do not need cooking, or ready-made foods that can go straight into the oven.
- Some people find drinking a small amount of alcohol just before, or with, food helps stimulate their appetite. Check with your doctor that you can have alcohol. Your doctor can also tell you if there are medicines that you may be able to have to help stimulate your appetite.
- Have nourishing drinks as well as small meals. These might include milkshakes, yoghurt drinks or fruit juices. These can contain a lot of sugar which can damage your teeth. Rinse your mouth out with water after having sugary drinks and brush your teeth regularly.

## Tips for managing changes to taste

- You may find it better to eat bland foods such as bread, potatoes and crackers. Keep trying different foods as your taste changes. Foods that you have not enjoyed may taste better after a few weeks.
- Try marinating meat in fruit juice or a sauce before cooking it. Use seasonings, spices and herbs such as pepper, cumin or rosemary to flavour your cooking. Serve food with sauces to add flavour. But be careful if your [mouth is sore](#). Some sauces, such as curry or sweet and sour, may feel painful to eat.
- Sharp-tasting foods can be refreshing and leave a pleasant taste in your mouth. These include fresh fruit, fruit juices and sugar-free sour or boiled sweets. Be careful if your mouth is sore as these may be painful to eat. If you no longer like tea or coffee, try fruit or herbal teas, milk or a cold drink.
- Some people find that cold foods taste better than hot foods. Cold meats may taste better served with pickle or chutney. You may find it helps to let your food cool before eating it.
- If you notice a metallic taste in your mouth, try using cutlery made of plastic, wood or bamboo.

## Macmillan Cancer Support resources

We have more information on our [website](#), including [audiobooks](#). Or you can order our free booklets and leaflets on [orders.macmillan.org.uk](https://orders.macmillan.org.uk) such as:

- MAC13613 [Eating problems and cancer](#)
- MAC13612 [Healthy eating and cancer](#)
- MAC13614 [The building-up diet](#)
- MAC16337\_ER [Eat a healthy diet](#) – Easy read

We produce information in a [range of formats](#) and [languages](#). To order these, visit our website or call our support line on **0808 808 00 00**.

## Further Macmillan support

If you have more questions or would like to talk to someone, call the Macmillan Support Line free on **0808 808 00 00**, 7 days a week, 8am to 8pm. Or visit [macmillan.org.uk](https://macmillan.org.uk) to [chat online](#) to one of our team.

Deaf or hard of hearing? Call using Relay UK on **18001 0808 808 00 00**, or use the [Relay UK app](#). Speak another language? Telephone interpreters are available. Please tell us in English the language you would like to use.

If you want to share your experiences or ask questions, you can find others who understand on our [Online Community](#). Our free [Macmillan Buddy service](#) can arrange weekly calls with a friendly volunteer who understands what you're going through.

## Other useful contact details

- British Dietetic Association (BDA) – visit [www.bda.uk.com](https://www.bda.uk.com)
- Diabetes UK Helpline – visit [www.diabetes.org.uk](https://www.diabetes.org.uk)
- Guts UK – visit [www.gutscharity.org.uk](https://www.gutscharity.org.uk)

## Notes and questions

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