

The building-up diet



About this booklet

This booklet is for people who are finding it difficult to maintain or put on weight during and after cancer treatment. It explains about different food types and has suggestions on how to add protein and energy to your diet.

It lists foods that it might be useful to have. It also has suggestions for meals and snacks. These might help when preparing meals. There is also information for carers, family members and friends.

We have other booklets about diet and cancer:

- **Healthy eating and cancer**
- **Eating problems and cancer.**

We also have information on our website about managing weight changes. Visit [macmillan.org.uk/changes-in-weight](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/changes-in-weight)

Check with your healthcare team that this is the right booklet for you, and whether you need more information.

How to use this booklet

This booklet is split into sections to help you find what you need. You do not have to read it from start to finish. You can use the contents list on page 3 to help you.

It is fine to skip parts of the booklet. You can always come back to them when you feel ready.

On pages 56 to 60, there are details of other organisations that can help.

Quotes

In this booklet, we have included quotes which you may find helpful. These are from people who have chosen to share their story with us. To share your experience, visit [macmillan.org.uk/shareyourstory](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/shareyourstory)

For more information

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://www.macmillan.org.uk)

If you would prefer to speak to us in another language, interpreters are available. Please tell us, in English, the language you want to use.

If you are deaf or hard of hearing, call us using Relay UK on **18001 0808 808 00 00**, or use the Relay UK app.

We have some information in different languages and formats, including audio, easy read, Braille, large print, interactive PDF and translations. To order these, visit [macmillan.org.uk/otherformats](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/otherformats) or call **0808 808 00 00**.

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Changes to your appetite and weight

Many people with cancer have weight loss at some time. Weight loss can be caused by cancer or be a side effect of cancer treatments. Losing weight can be distressing, especially when a person is already dealing with a cancer diagnosis and treatment.

The following cancer treatment side effects can lead to weight loss:

- Some types of surgery can affect someone's ability to eat.
- Radiotherapy to the head and neck area can cause a sore mouth.
- Some chemotherapy drugs can cause a person nausea (feeling sick), to have a sore mouth, or to lose their appetite. You can find out more about eating problems in our booklet **Eating problems and cancer** (page 50).

Some types of cancer can cause a person to lose weight. But this improves once the cancer has been treated.

Sometimes a cancer can cause someone to lose a lot of weight. The cancer may produce chemicals that make their body use calories more quickly than normal, and break down fat and protein more quickly. This can lead to a person losing weight, even if they are eating well and not doing very much. This condition is called cachexia. It usually only happens in people who have an advanced cancer.

If you are losing weight

If you lose a lot of weight, it is important to talk to a dietitian. They can suggest changes to your diet. They may suggest you take nutritional supplements to help prevent further weight loss and help you gain weight.

Try to keep active

It is important to try to keep active, even if you are losing weight. Keeping active will stop your muscles getting weak. It is important to do what you can and not try to do too much. Gentle exercise, such as going for a short walk, may be all you need. Your doctor, nurse or physiotherapist can advise you on how much and which types of exercise would be helpful for you.

You can find out more about keeping active in our booklet **Physical activity and cancer** (page 50).

Dietitians

Dietitians are qualified health professionals. They are experts in giving information and advice about food and food supplements. They can check your diet and talk to you about any specialist dietary needs you may have. These could be food intolerances, allergies or diabetes. They can give you advice about which foods are best for you and whether nutritional supplements may be helpful. You can find out more about nutritional supplements on pages 21 to 24.

You can ask your doctor or nurse at the hospital to refer you to a dietitian. In some hospitals, you can refer yourself. Contact the hospital's dietetic department for more information. If you are not in hospital, your GP or district nurse can refer you to a community dietitian. They may be able to visit you at home.

Know your food types

Food groups



Fruit and vegetables

Fruit and vegetables are a good source of vitamins, minerals and fibre. They are also usually low in fat.

Different types and colours of fruit and vegetables contain different nutrients. Try to have a wide variety of fruit and vegetables of different colours.

Carbohydrates (starchy foods)

Carbohydrates (starchy foods) are an important part of a healthy diet. They are a good source of energy and contain nutrients including fibre, calcium, iron and B vitamins.

Carbohydrates are broken down in the body to become glucose. Glucose is a type of sugar that gives us energy. Energy is measured in calories. We all need a certain number of calories each day for energy, even if we are not being very active. For example, you need energy to breathe, even when you are sitting down.

The amount of energy you need each day varies. It depends on how quickly your body uses the energy, and on how active you are. An adult man needs about 2,500 calories a day. An adult woman needs about 2,000 calories a day. If you eat and drink too many calories, you put on weight. If you have fewer calories than you need, you use up your body's energy stores and lose weight.

Fibre

The main role of fibre is to keep the digestive system and bowels healthy and prevent constipation. Fibre is also called roughage. Fibre is the part of cereals, fruits and vegetables that is not digested and passes down into the gut.

Some carbohydrates can be a good source of fibre, such as wholemeal bread and brown rice. Fruit and vegetables, beans and peas, and potatoes or yams with their skins are all good sources of fibre.

Protein

Your body needs protein to build and repair muscles and other body tissues. When we are ill, injured or stressed, we need extra protein and energy to repair any damage.

Protein-rich foods can also be a good source of vitamins and minerals. There is protein in:

- red meat
- poultry, such as chicken and turkey
- fish
- dairy products, such as milk and yoghurts
- eggs
- pulses, such as peas, beans and lentils
- soya, tofu and mycoprotein (Quorn™)
- quinoa
- nuts and seeds.

Sugar

Sugar gives us energy. There are different types of sugar. Some foods and drinks have natural sugars in them, such as fruit and milk. The body also gets glucose (a type of sugar needed for energy) by breaking down carbohydrates (page 9).

Added or processed sugars are sugars that are added to many types of food and drink. For example, this includes sweets, cakes and puddings, some fizzy drinks and squashes.

We have more information about sugar in our booklet **Healthy eating and cancer** (page 50).

Fats

Having some fat in our diet helps us to absorb vitamins A, D, E and K. Foods that are high in fat are also high in energy (calories). This means eating a lot of fat can help you to put on weight or prevent further weight loss.

There are 2 types of fat:

- Saturated fats are found mainly in meat, pies, sausages, butter, cheese, ghee, coconut oil, cakes and biscuits.
- Unsaturated fats are found mainly in vegetable-based cooking oils and spreads, nuts, avocado, seeds and oily fish such as salmon, sardines and mackerel.

Unsaturated fats are still high-energy (high-calorie) foods.

Generally, it is important to try to eat less fat, and to choose foods that contain unsaturated fats instead of saturated fats. But if you are trying to gain weight, you may need more fat in your diet.

Vitamins and minerals

The body needs minerals to help keep our nerves, bones and teeth healthy. Vitamins are essential to keep our bodies working. Different vitamins have different functions. These include:

- vitamin C, which helps keep our skin and bones healthy
- vitamin K, which helps wounds to heal.

We only need very small amounts of vitamins and minerals. If you are eating a healthy balanced diet with plenty of fruit and vegetables, you are probably getting enough vitamins.

But if you cannot eat well for a long time, you may need vitamin and mineral supplements. Your doctor, dietitian or pharmacist can give you more advice about these.

High-dose vitamin and mineral supplements are not recommended during cancer treatment. This is because they might affect how your treatment works.

Fluids

Your body needs fluid to work properly. You should aim to drink at least 2 litres (3½ pints) of fluids each day. You will need to drink more if you are:

- more active than normal
- somewhere hot (either indoors or outdoors)
- losing extra fluid, such as through sweat or diarrhoea.

Plain water is the best fluid to keep your body hydrated. It contains no calories and no sugars. If you do not like the taste, you could add a slice of lemon or lime, or some mint leaves. Some people prefer to drink water that is cold from the fridge.

If your appetite is poor, you can get more energy by having nourishing drinks such as milk, milkshakes and smoothies. Milk is a good source of calcium, which is good for bone health. It also contains other vitamins and minerals. If you are trying to gain weight or prevent further weight loss, try to have whole milk rather than semi-skimmed or skimmed milk.

Fruit and vegetable juices and smoothies contain a variety of nutrients. They can contribute to your fruit and vegetable intake. You should limit these to 1 glass a day as sugars are released during the juicing process.

Squashes and fizzy drinks can be high in sugar and calories. They contain very few nutrients, so you should avoid drinking them where possible.

Caffeine drinks may dehydrate you. This is because they make you pass urine (pee) more. Caffeine drinks include coffee, tea, some fizzy drinks and energy drinks. You can try decaffeinated tea and coffee. There are also drinks that are naturally decaffeinated, such as herbal and fruit teas.

Call the Macmillan Support Line free on
0808 808 00 00, 7 days a week, 8am to 8pm.



The building-up diet

People who are finding it difficult to eat enough need to find ways to add energy and protein to their diet. Adding energy and protein will also help if a person is losing weight.

The building-up diet is high in energy and protein. It is for people who have lost or are losing weight, or who can only manage to eat small amounts. Not everyone will put on weight with this diet. But it should help to slow down or stop further weight loss. Your doctor or dietitian may recommend foods that you normally think of as unhealthy. But this is just while you need help to put on weight.



“ I get tired eating as it now takes so long to finish a meal, so I end up spending most of the day eating just to get enough food into me to keep my calorie intake up, I try to take short cuts by having high-calorie foods. ”

Elise, diagnosed with bone cancer

Adding energy and protein to everyday foods

If you have a good appetite, you should be able to eat the extra calories and protein you may need if you are ill. But if you do not have a good appetite, there are ways to add extra energy and protein to your diet without needing to eat more food.

If you do not eat meat, poultry or fish, there are plenty of other foods that help add energy and protein. These include:

- cream and cheese
- nuts and nut butters
- avocados
- lentils, beans and chickpeas
- quinoa
- seeds and seed products such as tahini
- dried fruits
- sweet potatoes
- rice
- vegan cheese, spread and cream.

Talk to your cancer doctor, specialist nurse or a dietitian (page 7) if you find it difficult to eat enough. They may recommend or prescribe food (nutritional) supplements, such as milkshakes or juices (pages 21 to 24).

You may need to follow a special diet, for example if you have a lactose intolerance or diabetes. It is important to talk to a dietitian, GP or specialist doctor at the hospital for advice.

Fortified milk

You can add extra energy and protein to your diet without having to eat more. This is called fortifying your food. You can fortify milk by adding 2 to 4 tablespoons of dried milk powder to 570ml (1 pint) of full-fat milk and mixing it together. Keep it in the fridge and use it in drinks or on cereals. You can also use fortified milk or milk-based supplements to make soups, sauces, jellies, custards and puddings.

Plant-based milk

Apart from soya milk, most plant-based milks contain less protein than cow's milk. They may also contain fewer vitamins and minerals. Many plant-based milks have added supplements such as iodine or vitamin B12. You can check the label to see what has been added.

You can fortify plant-based milks, such as oat or coconut milk, by adding ground nuts or peanut butter powder. But you may also need to take a supplement to make sure you are getting enough nutrients. And you may need to get more protein from other sources.

Tips to add energy and protein to meals

The following tips can help you increase the protein and energy of different foods. When we talk about milk, cheese or cream, this can be a dairy product or a plant-based product.

- When shopping, choose full-fat foods instead of foods labelled 'diet' or 'light'.
- Fry foods in oil, ghee or butter.
- Add extra butter, cream or oil to bread, potatoes, pasta and cooked vegetables. Add cheese to cooked vegetables or soup. Add cream or drizzle oil over soup.
- Use fortified milk to make sauces. Add cream, plain yoghurt, sour cream, crème fraîche or cream cheese to sauces, soups and casseroles.
- Use fortified milk on cereals or to make porridge. Add golden syrup, honey or sugar to breakfast cereals or porridge. You can also add dried fruit or nuts, or fresh or stewed fruit.
- Add extra paneer to curries.
- Add whole or blended beans, lentils or peas to soups, curries, tagines, and stews and casseroles.
- Choose vegetables that are rich in protein and energy, such as spinach, sweetcorn, beans and lentils.
- Add evaporated milk, condensed milk or cream to desserts and hot drinks.
- Have cream, custard, or ice cream with desserts.

Quick meals and snacks

- Add peanut butter or other nut spreads, chocolate spread, tahini, honey or jam to bread, toast, crackers and biscuits.
- Add nut butters, avocado, Greek yoghurt or plant-based alternatives to smoothies.
- Use plenty of butter or spread in sandwiches. Add mayonnaise or salad cream to sandwich fillings or toppings such as tuna, chicken, avocado, egg or cheese.
- Add cream to canned soups, or make packet soups with fortified milk.



Nutritional supplements

The best way to get more energy and protein is by eating a healthy, balanced diet if you can. If you have eating problems or are losing weight, talk to your cancer doctor, specialist nurse, dietitian or GP. They can give you more advice.

There are many nutritional supplements that can add extra energy or protein (or both) to your diet. You can add them to your everyday foods or have them in addition to your normal diet. In some situations, supplements can be used to replace meals.

There are different types of nutritional supplements available.

These include:

- milk-based supplements
- juice type supplements
- soups
- powders that are made into drinks with water or milk
- ready-made puddings
- concentrated liquids.

They come in different flavours. Some are savoury and some are sweet.

You can buy some products from your chemist or supermarket. But many of them are only available on prescription. Your cancer doctor, specialist nurse or dietitian can advise you about supplements and prescribe them for you if needed. It is important to follow the advice of your doctor or dietitian when using high-protein or high-energy supplements.

Your doctor, nurse or dietitian can make sure supplements meet your needs and preferences. For example, if you:

- are vegetarian or vegan
- follow a kosher or halal diet
- have a dietary intolerance, such as to dairy (lactose) or gluten.

If you have diabetes, it is important to get advice from your GP, specialist nurse or dietitian before using nutritional supplements.

Many producers of nutritional supplements provide recipes that use their products. Read the packet or visit the product website for details.

Milk-based supplements

Milk-based supplements are available on prescription in a range of flavours including sweet, savoury and neutral flavours. They usually need to be used within 24 hours of opening. You do not need to drink them all at once. You can have some and keep the rest in the fridge for later. Milk-based supplements can also be added to:

- soups
- breakfast cereals
- porridge
- milkshakes
- smoothies
- hot drinks.

Juice-type supplements

These are ready-made, flavoured supplements that are available on prescription.

If you find them too sweet, you can dilute them with water or fizzy drinks such as soda water or tonic water. You can also put them into jellies or puddings.

High-energy and juice-tasting supplements have a high sugar content. If you have diabetes, a dietitian can advise you about using these drinks. If you have a sore mouth or throat, they may not be suitable, as they may sting. If you have had radiotherapy for a head and neck cancer, you may be at greater risk of tooth decay.

Powdered drinks

You can buy some powdered supplements at a pharmacist or supermarket. Others need to be prescribed. Some powdered drink supplements can be used to replace a meal.

You can mix them with fortified milk (page 18), regular milk or water. You can mix some powder supplements into soup, custards or milk puddings. Some companies that make the powders have recipes on their websites.

Fat-based liquids

You can take fat-based liquids separately in small doses. Or you can add them to some foods. Your doctor or dietitian will give you advice on how and when you should use this type of supplement.

Energy and protein powders and gels

Your GP or dietitian may prescribe unflavoured powders and gels. These are almost tasteless. You can add them to drinks, soups, sauces and gravies, casseroles, milk puddings and desserts.

Your dietitian can explain how much powder to use in different meals or drinks.

Looking after your teeth

You may be eating more sugary and sweet items when trying to gain weight. Some supplements are also sweet.

It is always important to look after your teeth, but especially when you are having more sweet foods. Brush your teeth 2 times a day with a fluoride toothpaste. It is a good idea to clean your teeth or use a mouthwash after any sugary foods. Your healthcare team can advise you about a suitable mouthwash to use. Chewing sugar-free gum after you have eaten sweet foods can also help. Make sure you have your teeth regularly checked by a dentist. Always tell a dentist that you have cancer and if you are having any treatment. Your GP, nurse or dietitian can give you more advice.





Planning your meals

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Shopping list

Here is a list of items you might want to stock up on. It can help you have foods available which are high in energy and protein. We have listed foods that last for longer. Check expiry dates of items such as dairy foods and bakery items. You will still need to shop for fresh fruit and vegetables. If you eat meat and fish, you will need to buy these fresh or frozen.

For the store cupboard

You might want to buy:

- porridge oats, oatmeal, cereals
- sugar, maple syrup, golden syrup, honey
- bread, paratha, chapatis, naan, pitta, muffins, crumpets, tortillas
- sweet breads and pastries, croissants, Danish pastries
- pasta
- rice
- sweet and savoury biscuits, cakes
- nuts, seeds, sev, Bombay mix
- evaporated milk, condensed milk, dried milk powder
- drinking chocolate, malted drinks
- dried fruit, tinned fruit
- tinned vegetables, baked beans
- peanut butter, jam, marmalade, chocolate spread

- puddings such as tinned custard, instant desserts, rice pudding
- jelly
- oil, ghee
- mayonnaise, salad cream, oil-based salad dressings
- tins or packets of soup
- tins of fish, such as mackerel or sardines
- full-sugar squash drinks, cordials
- chocolate.



For the fridge

You might want to buy:

- full-fat milk, plant-based milk
- cream, crème fraiche, plant-based alternative
- butter, margarine, vegan spread
- full-fat pasteurised cheese, vegan cheese
- eggs
- full-fat hummus and dips
- pakoras, samosas, bhajis, spring rolls
- full-fat yoghurt, fromage frais, lassi, plant-based yoghurts
- ready-made smoothies, milkshakes
- ready-made puddings such as trifle, crème caramel, fruit crumble or steamed puddings
- ready-made custard.

For the freezer

You might want to buy:

- ice cream, ice lollies or sorbet
- kulfi
- frozen ready meals
- frozen fruit
- frozen vegetables
- grated cheese.



“ I'm now on stronger anti-sickness medication, which helps, but I am still struggling with food and have lost a stone in weight. With my husband's help I'm tinkering with recipes to cook things I can face that are healthy but pack a few extra calories. ”

Sal, diagnosed with breast cancer

Meal ideas

We have put together some ideas for breakfast, lunch, dinner, puddings and snacks. These can help you get more protein and energy into your diet, without having to eat more food. These are just ideas, and you can adapt your own dishes in ways that work best for you. You can use different ingredients from those we have suggested.

If you do not eat dairy products, you can replace:

- full-fat milk with soya, oat, rice, hazelnut, almond or coconut milk
- cream with coconut or soya cream
- butter with olive oil, rapeseed oil, vegetable or coconut oil, or dairy-free spreads
- yoghurt with soya or coconut yoghurt.

If you have lost your sense of smell, you may want to add some spices to give flavour. Check the packaging to see how hot or spicy it is. If you want to make a dish milder in flavour, try adding natural yoghurt.

Between meals, you can keep up your energy intake with nourishing snacks and drinks.

Breakfast

Here are some suggestions:

- Fried egg and bacon with fried bread.
- Scrambled eggs or an omelette with grated cheese. Add toast with butter, plant-based spread or ghee.
- Scrambled tofu with spinach and grilled tomatoes.
- An English muffin, crumpet or toast spread thickly with butter or dairy-free spread, and honey, jam, peanut butter, chocolate spread or sliced banana.
- Stewed fruit, with full-fat dairy or plant-based yoghurt. Add cereal, seeds or nuts.
- Porridge made with fortified milk or plant-based milk (page 18). Add cream or a plant-based alternative, sugar, honey, golden syrup, toasted seeds, fresh fruit or jam.
- Dalia (cracked wheat), cooked as either a savoury or sweet dish.
- Cornmeal porridge with condensed milk and coconut.
- Caribbean hard-dough (hardo) bread with butter.
- Minced beef congee or assorted dumplings. Add some deep-fried peanuts.
- Wholewheat cereal such as Weetabix®, cornflakes or bran flakes with fortified milk or coconut milk and sugar.
- A fruit smoothie with added avocado and full-fat yoghurt.

Lunch and lighter meals

Here are some suggestions:

- A tuna and cucumber sandwich with butter and mayonnaise or salad cream. Other sandwich fillings include hard-boiled egg, chicken, cheese or falafel.
- Baked beans on toast.
- Mashed avocado on toast.
- Thick vegetable or lentil soup, drizzled with extra olive oil or sprinkled with cheese. Serve with bread of your choice.
- Baked potato with baked beans, tuna in mayonnaise or grated cheese. Add extra butter or dairy-free spread.
- A warm salad, made with quinoa and roasted vegetables. Add feta cheese, tempeh or tofu and drizzle with olive oil.
- Stuffed paratha or chapati with vegetables, rice, vegetable curry or hard-boiled egg and potato curry. Use ghee, butter or extra oil for cooking.

Try having rice pudding, yoghurt or some fruit after lunch too. We have more ideas for puddings (page 37).

Dinner

Here are some suggestions:

- Mixed bean chili or stew with rice, other grains or potatoes. Add some grated cheese or vegan cheese.
- Noodles, plain rice or fried rice with mixed seafood or meat and vegetables.
- Meat or vegetable lasagne, spaghetti bolognese or pasta bake with extra cheese. Add a salad with dressing, mayonnaise or salad cream.
- Roast chicken or nut roast with potatoes and fresh vegetables. Add butter to the vegetables and potatoes.
- Curry with added beans or lentils, rice, naan bread and salad. Add coconut milk or cream to the curry.
- Khichari (lentils and rice), lentil soup or shorba (lamb and chicken soup).
- Caribbean chicken with mashed potato, callaloo and sweetcorn. Add butter to the vegetables and butter, cream and cheese to the potatoes.
- Steamed fish with black bean sauce and plain rice.
- Shepherd's pie made with minced meat, soya mince, Quorn™ or lentils. Use fortified milk (page 18) and butter in the mashed potato, or grated cheese on top. Serve with vegetables topped with butter.

Puddings

Here are some suggestions:

- Stewed fruit, or fruit crumble with fresh cream, crème fraiche, yoghurt, custard, ice cream or plant-based alternative.
- Fruit fool, yoghurt or fromage frais – choose a full-fat variety.
- Fruit or chocolate trifle – choose a full-fat variety.
- Rice pudding.
- Microwave or ready-made puddings with fresh cream, crème fraiche, yoghurt, custard, ice cream or plant-based alternative.

Try adding ice cream, cream, evaporated milk or a plant-based alternative to cold puddings. Try adding custard made with fortified milk or plant-based milk to hot puddings (page 18). You could add sugar or syrup to some ready-made puddings. Try making instant desserts with fortified milk or a dairy-free alternative, such as oat cream or nut butters.

You could also try making some puddings using different ready-made or powdered supplements (pages 21 to 24). Manufacturers of nutritional products often have recipe booklets. Check the packets or their websites for more information.

Snacks

Keep snacks handy to have between meals. For example:

- unsalted nuts
- pasteurised cheese
- dried fruit
- biscuits
- fruit loaf with butter
- cakes or scones with jam and cream
- breadsticks and dips
- full-fat yoghurts or fromage frais.

If you are out of the house for some time, think about taking snacks or a nourishing drink with you.

Drinks

Use fortified milk or a plant-based alternative when making hot drinks (page 18). If your doctor, nurse or dietitian has prescribed high-energy powder supplements, you can add this to hot or cold drinks. Your doctor or dietitian can tell you how much to add.

You can drink ready-made nutritional supplement drinks straight from the container. You may want to heat the drinks, or use them in recipes. You can drink them between meals to help you put on weight. In some situations, you may have them instead of a meal.

You might want to make your own drinks. Here are some examples:

- Fruit smoothie – blend banana, peaches, strawberries or other soft fruit (fresh or frozen) with fortified milk, fruit juice, ice cream, yoghurt or a plant-based alternative. Add avocado for extra calories.
- Milk smoothie – blend 200ml of full-fat milk, 2 tablespoons of milk powder, 2 scoops of ice cream and some milkshake syrup or powder. Blend until well-mixed and frothy. You can change the flavour of the ice cream to match the milkshake syrup or powder.
- Nutritious milkshake – mix fortified milk with puréed fruit or a fruit yoghurt. Add 2 to 3 teaspoons of a high-energy powder supplement if prescribed by your GP or dietitian. A scoop of ice cream will add extra energy. Use non-dairy products for a vegan alternative.



Coping with weight loss

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Your feelings about weight loss

Weight loss can be upsetting and difficult to cope with. It can be a visible reminder of your illness. It can also affect your body image. Body image is the picture you have in your mind of how you look. It is how we think and feel about our bodies and how we believe others see us. Body image can be linked to feelings of self-worth.

If you lose weight because of cancer or its treatment, you will look different to how you used to look. You may find it hard to accept that you look different. You may have different emotions, such as feeling angry, anxious or sad. It is natural to feel like this. You may meet other people who have similar thoughts and feelings. It takes time to adjust to how you look.

You may worry that the change in your appearance will affect your relationships with a partner, family or friends. You may be anxious about what people think of you. Or you may feel self-conscious about eating when you are with other people.

You might find it helpful to read our booklets:

- **Body image and cancer**
- **How are you feeling? The emotional effects of cancer**

You can order our booklets and leaflets for free.

Visit orders.macmillan.org.uk or call **0808 808 00 00**.



Talking about how you feel

People often keep their thoughts and feelings about their bodies to themselves. But keeping your worries to yourself can make them become a bigger concern. Talking to someone can help you feel better about yourself. It may help you feel less anxious about what other people think.

Many people find it helps to talk to someone they trust. This could be a partner, family member or friend. Or you could talk to your doctor or specialist nurse. Some people find it helpful to speak to a counsellor. Your GP or nurse can tell you how to contact one.

If someone you care about has had physical changes, it may take you time to adjust and accept the changes. You may need to talk about your feelings too.

Getting help with meals

You may not always feel well enough to shop or cook food for yourself or others. This may be frustrating. If you usually prepare the meals for your family, it may feel hard to let someone else do this. Try not to feel guilty about letting someone else do the things you usually do. When you feel better, you can go back to your routine.

You may find it easier to use ready meals or pre-prepared meals on days when you do not feel like cooking. This is fine to do sometimes. You can always add some fresh vegetables, salad or fruit to the meal.

If you live on your own and need help with cooking or shopping, talk to your healthcare team at the hospital or your GP. They may be able to arrange for help at home, meals on wheels or a local organisation to help you with cooking or shopping.

Caring for someone who has lost weight

If you are the main carer for someone with cancer, it can be difficult to know how to deal with eating problems, such as lack of appetite or weight loss. Mealtimes are usually an enjoyable and important part of life. It can be upsetting and worrying when you have prepared a meal and the person is not interested in food or cannot eat very much.

Cancer, cancer treatments and other medicines can all affect someone's appetite. The person you are caring for may feel sick or have diarrhoea or constipation. This can stop them eating.

They may:

- feel too tired to eat
- have a sore or dry throat or mouth
- find chewing and swallowing difficult.

The amount someone can eat may change each day, and their likes and dislikes may also change. Try not to put pressure on someone to eat. This can be stressful for both of you. If you know when their appetite is at its best, you can make the most of it. For example, you could treat them to their favourite foods.

If the person you are caring for continues to struggle with food and is losing weight, speak to their doctor or nurse. They can refer them to a dietitian. The dietitian can advise them about what they eat. They may suggest using nutritional supplement drinks if needed.



Tips to help build up someone's diet

- Ask the person what they would like to eat.
- Try to talk openly about their weight loss and what both of you think will help. This can help you both feel more in control.
- The person you are caring for may find cooking smells make them feel sick. Prepare food in a different room if possible and open the windows when cooking.
- Give them smaller meals and snacks, whenever they feel like eating. If they never feel like eating, try to make sure they have regular small meals and snacks.
- Try not to offer drinks before a meal. This can make the person feel too full to eat.
- Offer them their favourite foods at the times when you know their appetite is good.
- Make batches of their favourite meals and freeze portions to use at another time.
- Keep snacks in easy reach so they are ready whenever the person feels hungry.
- Stock up on items you know they like. You can then prepare meals and snacks easily.
- Avoid low-fat or diet products. For example, choose whole milk rather than skimmed or semi-skimmed milk.
- If the person would like it, try offering a small amount of alcohol just before, or with, food. Some people find this helps their appetite. Check with the healthcare team that the person can have alcohol.
- Add extra energy to everyday meals and drinks (pages 17 to 20). For example, try adding fortified milk to tea or coffee (page 18).
- Encourage the person to do some physical activity, if possible. This can help increase their appetite. Ask the person's healthcare team for advice about what they can do.

The person you are caring for may have problems such as:

- nausea (feeling sick)
- vomiting (being sick)
- a sore mouth
- changes to their taste.

If they have any of these symptoms, ask their healthcare team for advice.

You can find out more about these symptoms in our booklet **Eating problems and cancer** (page 50).

Make sure you have support. It is important to look after yourself and make sure you are eating well yourself. We have more information in our booklet **Looking after someone with cancer** (page 50).

Serving food

- Serve food in a well-ventilated room with the window open.
- Try to create a comfortable eating environment. Make sure the person is in a comfortable position.
- Present meals so they look appetising.
- Keep servings small. Too much food can be overwhelming and off-putting. The person can always have more if they want to.
- The person you are caring for may want to go out to a cafe or restaurant for food. You can call ahead and ask if they can prepare softer, easier-to-eat foods, or smaller portions.
- Try not to worry if the person you are caring for cannot eat what you have cooked. Gently encourage them to eat but try not to push them too much.



**MACMILLAN
SUPPORT**

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About our information

We provide expert, up-to-date information about cancer. And all our information is free for everyone.

Our information has the PIF Tick quality mark for trusted health information. This means our information has been through a professional and strong production process.

Order what you need

You may want to order more booklets or leaflets like this one. Visit **orders.macmillan.org.uk** or call us on **0808 808 00 00**.

We have booklets about different cancer types, treatments and side effects. We also have information about work, financial issues, diet, life after cancer treatment and information for carers, family and friends.

Online information

All our information is also available online at **macmillan.org.uk/information-and-support** You can also find videos featuring stories from people affected by cancer, and information from health and social care professionals.

Other formats

We also provide information in different languages and formats, including:

- audiobooks
- Braille
- British Sign Language
- easy read booklets
- interactive PDFs
- large print
- translations.

Find out more at **macmillan.org.uk/otherformats**

If you would like us to produce information in a different format for you, email us at **informationproductionteam@macmillan.org.uk** or call us on **0808 808 00 00**.

The language we use

We want everyone affected by cancer to feel our information is written for them.

We want our information to be as clear as possible. To do this, we try to:

- use plain English
- explain medical words
- use short sentences
- use illustrations to explain text
- structure the information clearly
- make sure important points are clear.

We use gender-inclusive language and talk to our readers as 'you' so that everyone feels included. Where clinically necessary we use the terms 'men' and 'women' or 'male' and 'female'. For example, we do so when talking about parts of the body or mentioning statistics or research about who is affected.

To find out more about how we produce our information, visit **macmillan.org.uk/ourinfo**



Other ways we can help you

At Macmillan, we know how a cancer diagnosis can affect everything, and we are here to support you.

Talk to us

If you or someone you know is affected by cancer, talking about how you feel and sharing your concerns can really help.

Macmillan Support Line

Our support line is made up of specialist teams who can help you with:

- emotional and practical support if you or someone you know has been diagnosed with cancer
- clinical information from our specialist nurses about things like diagnosis and treatments
- welfare rights advice, for information about benefits and general money worries.

To contact any of our teams, call the Macmillan Support Line for free on **0808 808 00 00**. Or visit [macmillan.org.uk/support-line](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/support-line) to chat online and find the options and opening times.

Our trained cancer information advisers can listen and signpost you to further support.

Our cancer information nurse specialists can talk you through information about your diagnosis and treatment. They can help you understand what to expect from your diagnosis and provide information to help you manage symptoms and side effects.

If you are deaf or hard of hearing, call us using Relay UK on **18001 0808 808 00 00**, or use the Relay UK app.

You can also email us, or use the Macmillan Chat Service via our website. You can use the chat service to ask our advisers about anything that is worrying you. Tell them what you would like to talk about so they can direct your chat to the right person. Click on the 'Chat to us' button, which appears on pages across the website. Or go to **macmillan.org.uk/talktous**

If you would like to talk to someone in a language other than English, we also offer an interpreter service for our Macmillan Support Line. Call **0808 808 00 00** and say, in English, the language you want to use. Or send us a web chat message saying you would like an interpreter. Let us know the language you need and we'll arrange for an interpreter to contact you.

Macmillan Information and Support Centres

Our Information and Support Centres are based in hospitals, libraries and mobile centres. Visit one to get the information you need and speak with someone face to face. If you would like a private chat, most centres have a room where you can speak with someone confidentially.

Find your nearest centre at **macmillan.org.uk/informationcentres** or call us on **0808 808 00 00**.

Help with money worries

Having cancer can bring extra costs such as hospital parking, travel fares and higher heating bills. If you have been affected in this way, we can help. Please note the opening times may vary by service.

Financial advice

Our expert money advisers on the Macmillan Support Line can help you deal with money worries and recommend other useful organisations that can help.

Help accessing benefits

You can speak to our money advisers for more information. Call us free on **0808 808 00 00**. Visit **[macmillan.org.uk/financialsupport](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/financialsupport)** for more information about benefits.

Help with work and cancer

Whether you are an employee, a carer, an employer or are self-employed, we can provide information to help you manage cancer at work. Visit **[macmillan.org.uk/work](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/work)**

Talk to others

No one knows more about the impact cancer can have on your life than those who have been through it themselves. That is why we help bring people together in their communities and online.

Support groups

Whether you are someone living with cancer or a carer, family member or friend, we can help you find support in your local area, so you can speak face to face with people who understand. Find out about support groups in your area by calling us or by visiting **[macmillan.org.uk/selfhelpandsupport](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/selfhelpandsupport)**

Online Community

Thousands of people use our Online Community to make friends, blog about their experiences and join groups to meet other people going through the same things. You can access it any time of day or night. Share your experiences, ask questions, or just read through people's posts at **[macmillan.org.uk/community](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/community)**

You can also use our Ask an Expert service on the Online Community. You can ask a money adviser, cancer information nurse or an information and support adviser any questions you have.

Macmillan healthcare professionals

Our nurses, doctors and other health and social care professionals give expert care and support to individuals and their families. Call us or ask your GP, consultant, district nurse or hospital ward sister if there are any Macmillan professionals near you.

Other useful organisations

There are lots of other organisations that can give you information or support. Details correct at time of printing.

Nutrition and diet information and support

British Dietetic Association

Tel: **0121 200 8080**

www.bda.uk.com

Provides general information about food and health. Has information about accessing a dietitian, and a number of food factsheets about medical conditions and diet.

British Nutrition Foundation

Tel: **0207 557 7930**

www.nutrition.org.uk

Has information about different food types and healthy eating.

Diabetes UK

Helpline (England, Wales and Northern Ireland): **0345 123 2399**

Helpline (Scotland): **0141 212 8710**

www.diabetes.org.uk

Provides information and support to anyone affected by any type of diabetes. Has information about managing diabetes and also funds research.

General cancer support organisations

Black Women Rising

www.blackwomenrisinguk.org

Aims to educate, inspire and bring opportunities for women from the BAME community. Shares stories and supports Black cancer patients and survivors through treatment and remission.

Cancer Black Care

Tel **0734 047 1970**

www.cancerblackcare.org.uk

Provides support for all those living with and affected by cancer, with an emphasis on Black people and people of colour.

Cancer Focus Northern Ireland

Helpline **0800 783 3339**

www.cancerfocusni.org

Offers a variety of services to people affected by cancer in Northern Ireland.

Maggie's

Tel **0300 123 1801**

www.maggies.org

Has a network of centres in many locations throughout the UK. Provides free information about cancer and financial benefits. Also offers emotional and social support to people with cancer, their family, and friends.

General health information

Drinkaware

www.drinkaware.co.uk

Provides independent alcohol advice, information and tools to help people make better choices about their drinking. Also has a web chat, for anyone concerned about their own drinking, or someone else's.

Health and Social Care in Northern Ireland

www.northerntrust.hscni.net

Provides information about health and social care services in Northern Ireland.

NHS.UK

www.nhs.uk

The UK's biggest health information website. Has service information for England.

NHS 111 Wales

111.wales.nhs.uk

NHS health information site for Wales.

NHS Inform

Helpline **0800 22 44 88**

www.nhsinform.scot

NHS health information site for Scotland.

Counselling

British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP)

Tel **0145 588 3300**

www.bacp.co.uk

Promotes awareness of counselling and signposts people to appropriate services across the UK. You can also search for a qualified counsellor on the 'Therapist directory' page.

UK Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP)

Tel **0207 014 9955**

www.psychotherapy.org.uk

Holds the national register of psychotherapists and psychotherapeutic counsellors, listing practitioners who meet exacting standards and training requirements.

Emotional and mental health support

Mind

Helpline **0300 123 3393**

www.mind.org.uk

Provides information, advice and support to anyone with a mental health problem through its Helpline and website.

Samaritans

Helpline **116 123**

Email **jo@samaritans.org**

www.samaritans.org

Provides confidential and non-judgemental emotional support, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, for people experiencing feelings of distress or despair.

LGBT-specific support

OUTpatients

www.outpatients.org.uk

A safe space for anybody who identifies as part of the queer spectrum and has had an experience with any kind of cancer at any stage.

Also produces resources about LGBT cancer experiences.

OUTpatients runs a peer support group with Maggie's Barts.

Support for carers

Carers UK

Helpline **0808 808 7777**

www.carersuk.org

Offers information and support to carers across the UK. Has an online forum and can put people in contact with local support groups for carers.

Disclaimer

We make every effort to ensure that the information we provide is accurate and up to date but it should not be relied upon as a substitute for specialist professional advice tailored to your situation. So far as is permitted by law, Macmillan does not accept liability in relation to the use of any information contained in this publication, or third-party information or websites included or referred to in it. Some photos are of models.

Thanks

This booklet has been written, revised and edited by Macmillan Cancer Support's Cancer Information Development team. It has been approved by members of Macmillan's Centre of Clinical Expertise.

With thanks to: Laura Askins, Senior Specialist Dietitian; Megan Pattwell, Senior Specialist Dietitian; and Rhia Saggi, Programme Manager, Healthcare Leaders' Fellowship, Registered Dietitian.

Thanks also to the people affected by cancer who reviewed this edition, and those who shared their stories.

We welcome feedback on our information. If you have any, please contact **informationproductionteam@macmillan.org.uk**

Sources

Below is a sample of the sources used in our building-up diet information. If you would like more information about the sources we use, please contact us at **informationproductionteam@macmillan.org.uk**

Oral Nutritional Supplements (ONS). The British Association for Parenteral and Enteral Nutrition (BAPEN). Available from www.bapen.org.uk/education/nutrition-support/nutrition-by-mouth/oral-nutritional-supplements-ons [accessed July 2023].

Dietary advice with or without oral nutritional supplements for disease-related malnutrition in adults. Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews 2021, Issue 12. Available from DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD002008.pub5 [accessed July 2023].

Muscaritoli M, Arends J et al. ESPEN practical guideline: Clinical Nutrition in Cancer. *Clinical Nutrition* 40 (2021). 2898–2913. Available from www.espen.org/files/ESPEN-Guidelines/ESPEN-practical-guideline-clinical-nutrition-in-cancer.pdf [accessed July 2023].

Can you do something to help?

We hope this booklet has been useful to you. It is just one of our many publications that are available free to anyone affected by cancer.

They are produced by our cancer information specialists who, along with our nurses, benefits advisers, campaigners and volunteers, are part of the Macmillan team. When people are facing the toughest fight of their lives, we are here to support them every step of the way.

We want to make sure no one has to go through cancer alone, so we need more people to help us. When the time is right for you, here are some ways in which you can become a part of our team.

5 ways you can help someone with cancer

1. **Share your cancer experience**

Support people living with cancer by telling your story, online, in the media or face to face.

2. **Campaign for change**

We need your help to make sure everyone gets the right support. Take an action, big or small, for better cancer care.

3. **Help someone in your community**

A lift to an appointment. Help with the shopping. Or just a cup of tea and a chat. Could you lend a hand?

4. **Raise money**

Whatever you like doing you can raise money to help. Take part in one of our events or create your own.

5. **Give money**

Big or small, every penny helps. To make a one-off donation see over.

Please fill in your personal details

Mr/Mrs/Miss/Other

Name

Surname

Address

Postcode

Phone

Email

Please accept my gift of £
(Please delete as appropriate)

I enclose a cheque / postal order /
Charity Voucher made payable to
Macmillan Cancer Support

OR debit my:

Visa / MasterCard / CAF Charity
Card / Switch / Maestro

Card number

Valid from

Expiry date

Issue no

Security number

Signature

Date / /

Do not let the taxman keep your money

Do you pay tax? If so, your gift will be worth 25% more to us – at no extra cost to you. All you have to do is tick the box below, and the tax office will give 25p for every pound you give.

I am a UK tax payer and I would like Macmillan Cancer Support to treat all donations I make or have made to Macmillan Cancer Support in the last 4 years as Gift Aid donations, until I notify you otherwise.

I understand that if I pay less Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax than the amount of Gift Aid claimed on all my donations in that tax year it is my responsibility to pay any difference. I understand Macmillan Cancer Support will reclaim 25p of tax on every £1 that I give.

Macmillan Cancer Support and our trading companies would like to hold your details in order to contact you about our fundraising, campaigning and services for people affected by cancer. If you would prefer us not to use your details in this way please tick this box.

In order to carry out our work we may need to pass your details to agents or partners who act on our behalf.

If you would rather donate online go to macmillan.org.uk/donate



Please cut out this form and return it in an envelope (no stamp required) to: Supporter Donations, Freepost RUCY-XGCA-XTHU, Macmillan Cancer Support, PO Box 791, York House, York YO1 0NJ

This booklet is for people who might be finding it hard to maintain or put on weight during and after cancer treatment.

The booklet includes suggested shopping lists and some meal ideas. There is also information for carers, family members and friends.

At Macmillan we know cancer can disrupt your whole life. We'll do whatever it takes to help everyone living with cancer in the UK get the support they need right now, and transform cancer care for the future.

For information, support or just someone to talk to, call **0808 808 00 00** or visit **macmillan.org.uk**

Would you prefer to speak to us in another language? Interpreters are available. Please tell us in English the language you would like to use. Are you deaf or hard of hearing? Call us using Relay UK on **18001 0808 808 00 00**, or use the Relay UK app.

Need information in different languages or formats? We produce information in audio, interactive PDFs, easy read, Braille, large print and translations. To order these, visit **macmillan.org.uk/otherformats** or call our support line.

The logo consists of a blue rounded rectangle containing the text 'Trusted Information Creator' in black. To the right of the text is a large green checkmark.

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