

Increasing Calories and Protein in Your Diet

For patients having difficulty eating enough during cancer treatment

This pamphlet covers:

- Why calories and proteins are important during cancer treatment
- How to add high calorie and high protein foods to meals and snacks
- Eating tips



Eating during cancer treatment can sometimes be difficult. Focusing on high calorie and high protein foods can help.

Calories from the foods you eat give your body energy. Energy is important to help keep your weight stable and help you stay strong during treatment.

Protein helps your body heal, maintain muscle and build your immune system to fight infections.

How to add more calories to your diet

Add these high calorie foods to your meals or snacks.

Butter, ghee, margarine (non-hydrogenated) and vegetable oils

- Add to hot cereals, soups, mashed potatoes, rice, pasta and cooked vegetables
- Spread on bread when making sandwiches
- Blend into a smoothie or shake

Sauces (such as Alfredo, pesto, Hollandaise, cream) and gravies

- Add to eggs and cooked vegetables
- Mix with meat dishes, pasta and rice

Table cream, whipping cream, coconut milk and coconut whipped topping

- Use in soups and sauces
- Add to hot chocolate, gelatin desserts and cereals
- Put on top of pancakes, waffles, French toast and fruit

Cream cheese, mayonnaise, salad dressings and avocado

- Add to sandwiches, bagels, crackers and fruit
- Use it in dips for pita bread, chips and vegetables

Jams, jellies, syrups, honey and sweetened condensed milk

- Add to breads, muffins, yogurt, ice cream, hot cereal, pudding and fruit
- Spread on pancakes, bagels, waffles and French toast
- Blend into smoothies and shakes

How to add more protein to your diet

Add these high protein food to your meals or snacks.

Meat, poultry and fish

- Add to salads, casseroles, soups and pasta dishes
- Use in sandwiches, tacos and wraps

Eggs and egg substitutes

- Add to salads, casseroles, soups and sandwiches
- Keep hard boiled whole eggs in the refrigerator to use as a snack

Legumes (such as lentils, chick peas, kidney beans and edamame)

- Add to salads and soups
- Mix with rice, pasta and vegetable dishes
- Have as hummus or bean dip

Milk (such as cow, goat), kefir and soy beverages

- Use in soups and sauces
- Use in hot chocolate, hot cereals and gelatin desserts instead of water
- Drink “high protein” milk instead of regular milk and use it for cooking (see recipe)

High protein milk recipe

- 1 cup (250 mL) whole milk
 - 2 tbsp (60 mL) skim milk powder
1. Add milk powder to liquid milk. Blend well.
 2. Refrigerate.
 3. Use within 24 hours.

Yogurt, skyr and sour cream

- Add to potatoes, perogies, crepes and fruit
- Use in dips, salad dressings and smoothies

Cheese, cottage cheese, ricotta cheese, tofu and tempeh

- Add to sandwiches, eggs, soups, rice or potatoes
- Combine with fruits and vegetables
- Melt onto omelets, into sauces or over pizzas
- Have with bagels, crackers, Naan, bread and pita bread

Nuts (such as peanuts, almonds, walnuts, cashews)

Seeds (such as sunflower, pumpkin, chia, sesame, hemp hearts)

- Sprinkle on cereals, salads and fruit plates
- Add to muffins, casseroles and bread recipes
- Use in trail mix and snack on this throughout the day

Nut butters and seed butters

- Spread on sandwiches, muffins, crackers, raw vegetables
- Add to ice cream, milkshakes and hot cereals

Wheat germ and Brewer's yeast

- Sprinkle on cereals, soups and salads
- Add to muffins, casseroles and bread recipes
- Mix into smoothies and shakes

Quinoa, kamut and teff (cooked)

- Add to cereal, salads, smoothies and yogurt
- Use in soups, stews and homemade burgers

Protein powders (such as whey, soy, rice, pea, hemp)

- Blend into drinks and smoothies
- Add to soups, casseroles and mashed potatoes,
- Mix into muffin and bread recipes

Eating tips

- Eat small snacks during the day. This may be easier than eating a large meal.
- Have a small snack every 1 to 2 hours even if you do not feel hungry.
- Bring food with you when you go out. You may not always find food easily when you are away from home.
- Speak to your registered dietitian about using nutrition supplements like Ensure™ or Boost™ to see if they are right for you. They can be used to add calories and protein to your diet.

High calorie/high protein snack ideas

- Bagel with peanut butter and jam
- Carnation Breakfast Essentials™ Ready-to-Drink
- Cereal and milk
- Cheese or hummus and crackers
- Congee with meat, fish or tofu
- Cooked egg on toast
- Cottage cheese with chopped apple and cinnamon
- Greek yogurt with fruit
- Granola or trail mix (dried fruit, nuts, seeds)
- Cereal bars, granola bars
- Pita bread or tortilla chips with bean dip or guacamole
- Ice cream sprinkled with nuts or fruit

- Milk and cookies
- Milkshake or smoothie
- Peanut butter and jelly or banana sandwich
- Pizza (frozen mini, pizza pocket or slice)
- Pudding (tapioca or rice), custards
- Dessert tofu with fruit cocktail
- Chia pudding
- Roti and dahl
- Edamame (green soybeans) sprinkled with sea salt and sesame seed oil
- Muffin with cashew butter
- Instant soup that contains beans or lentils

Helpful resources at the Princess Margaret Patient & Family Library

- “Goes Down Easy: Recipes to help you cope with the challenge eating during cancer treatment” cookbook
- “What to Eat When You Don’t Feel Like Eating” pamphlet
- [How to Manage Loss of Appetite](#) pamphlet

To search online for these and other helpful resources, go to www.theprincessmargaret.ca:

- Select “Cancer Health Information” on the right menu bar
- Visit the Patient & Family Library on the main floor of Princess Margaret



Attend a class in your language. You can book a medical interpreter for this class at no cost to you. To book, please call 416 581 8604. Five weekdays advance notice is needed.

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