

Nutritional advice for oesophageal or gastric cancer patients with weight loss and poor appetite

Information for patients

This leaflet provides nutritional advice to help you to maintain body weight. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact your clinical nurse specialist (CNS).

The type of cancer you have will directly affect your ability to eat and drink normally and result in you losing weight or being at high risk of losing weight. Increasing your intake of calories and protein is key to maintaining body weight and preventing loss of fat and muscle. This will place you in a better position to live as normally as possible and undertake any treatments you have.

These are guidelines only. You can experiment based on your symptoms or preferences. With oesophageal cancers you must be very careful to stick to a soft to liquid diet only as you have a high risk of food getting stuck (food bolus obstruction).

Key advice

- Eating little and often is the best way to ensure you are meeting your nutritional needs (see recommended foods and snacks and foods to avoid overleaf).
- Try to have regular nutritional build-up drinks (see below).
- If possible, ensure all liquids contain calories, such as non-fizzy sports drinks or squash.
- Avoid fresh fruit juices as they can be acidic which causes gastric irritation.
- Avoid caffeinated and alcoholic drinks.
- Do not avoid sugar and carbohydrates as your body needs these.
- Drink full fat milk. Full fat milk provides 9 grams of protein and 165 calories per 250mls. Soya milk contains 7 grams of protein and 100 calories per 250mls.

Nutritional build-up drinks

Nutritional build-up drinks are very important. They are readymade liquid or powder base shakes that provide protein and calories in liquid form. Powders can be mixed with full fat milk and you can add liquids or soft foods such as natural yogurt to improve the taste. There are options for vegans. They are available through your GP and will be requested by your CNS or doctor. You can also buy shakes from supermarkets or pharmacies if you wish to.

Further help and advice

If your symptoms are rapidly worsening and you cannot manage to eat or drink or keep liquids down, please contact your CNS (or 111 or your local Emergency Department out of hours).

A referral to a specialist dietitian is available if you are struggling to maintain your weight or food intake.

Recommended foods	Foods to avoid
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cereals soaked in full fat milk (or porridge or Ready Brek) • Mashed potatoes with cream or butter, baked potato without the skin • Shepherd's pie (can use Quorn mince) • Bolognese (can use Quorn mince) • Fish pie • Soups without lumps or bone broth • Soft pasta dishes (well-cooked or fresh) • Soft fish in sauce • Well cooked vegetables • Scrambled, poached eggs, omelettes (add in wafer-thin finely chopped ham and cheese) • Grated cheese, cottage cheese, cheese pastes • Risotto • Soft lentil-based foods such as daal • Any meat-based pâté • Tinned spaghetti 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roasted potatoes, hard chips • Toast or crusty dry bread • Cereal with nuts or dried fruit • Drier or tough meats such as chicken breast, steak (unless you hand blend with gravy) • Crisps (unless they melt in the mouth, for example, Wotsits, Skips) • Undercooked vegetables • Battered or dry fish • Fried eggs • Hard boiled eggs unless mashed with sauce • Salad (especially stringy veg)

Recommended snacks include full fat yoghurts, custard pots, jellies, ice cream, ice lollies, rice pudding, pureed fruit pots, mashed banana, creamy soups without lumps, smoothies, biscuits dipped in liquid, smooth peanut butter, crème caramel, mousse, instant whip.

Top tips

- Buy a hand blender. Although blended food can be unattractive, it means you increase your nutritional options.
- Try to remain as active as you can. Shorts walks maintain muscle mass and strength and generate appetite.
- If you have nausea, see your CNS or GP as anti-sickness medications can be tried to improve your appetite.

PALS

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