



Canadian Cancer Society  
Société canadienne du cancer

# Eating Well When You Have Cancer



1 888 939-3333 | [cancer.ca](https://cancer.ca)

The Canadian Cancer Society would like to thank the people who shared their personal stories with us. To protect their privacy, and with their permission, we have changed their names.

We also thank those who offered recipes and tips to help others through their journey.

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## Introduction

This booklet will help you eat well during cancer treatment and recovery. It's written for people with cancer and for caregivers helping with menus, food shopping and preparing meals.

The truth is, eating well can be a challenge when you have cancer. And everyone is affected differently. Some people find their eating habits change only slightly, while others find that eating well is really hard. Many people are somewhere in-between.

How your eating is affected will depend on the type of cancer you have and the treatments you receive. But the goal for everyone is the same: to eat as well as you can and stay strong throughout your cancer treatment.

In these pages you'll find information, tips and ideas to help with:

- symptoms that can affect your eating
- treatment side effects that can affect your eating
- feelings and emotions that can disrupt your eating habits
- changes in how your body uses food and nutrients

You'll also hear from Canadians who offer their personal experiences as cancer survivors and caregivers. As people who've "been there," they'll tell you how they coped with eating problems, what they've learned along the way and what helped them eat well. Their words are included to help you understand that you are not alone and that help is there when you need it.

“ I actually started to enjoy cooking nutritious meals for my family. I tried to make it not just about me but about foods that I could stomach and my family could enjoy as well. ~ Zara

At the end of this booklet, you'll find some recipes to help you eat well. Some of them were provided by people who have had cancer themselves or a family member involved in their care.

## Why eating well is important

Eating well can help you at each stage of cancer treatment and recovery. It can give you energy, help you feel better and keep your body strong. It can help you cope with side effects during treatment. And it can help you heal and recover after treatment.



In general, eating well means eating a variety of healthy foods like vegetables, fruit and whole grains that help you stay at a healthy weight. *Canada's Food Guide* is a good place to start.

With cancer, eating well can sometimes be a problem. You may need to change what you eat if you start losing or gaining too much weight. You may need more of some foods and less of others to meet your nutritional needs and keep your strength up.

“ You do have to experiment. What works for one person doesn't necessarily work for another. So experiment with your food and be aware that it may not be easy for a while. ~ Dante

During treatment, how you respond to food can change from day to day. On some days you may have a good appetite. On others, you may feel you just can't eat much or can't resist a craving that's not healthy. All of these responses are normal.

“ I think you need to do what you need to do to just get yourself through chemo. If that means having a french fry here and there, so be it. If you keep the unhealthy stuff to an occasional indulgence, it should be easier to avoid it again when your body starts returning to normal. ~ Zara

### Consider seeing a registered dietitian

Because everyone's nutritional needs are different, you may want help from your healthcare team.

A registered dietitian can help you find ways to eat well and maintain a healthy body weight throughout your cancer experience.

*"I saw a dietitian several times. She gave me advice and empowered me to think for myself and to know there were things I could do to eat well."*  
~ Dante

### Boosting your immune system

Many people wonder whether eating specific foods will boost their immune system and help them fight cancer. It's important to know that no single diet, food or supplement can boost your immune system. The best thing you can do for your immune system is to follow an overall healthy lifestyle.

#### > TIPS

- Eat healthy foods every day.
- Eat fresh rather than processed foods as often as you can.
- Be active when you can. Any activity, even a short walk, can improve your appetite and reduce stress.
- Rest when you need to. Even if you can't sleep at night, you can rest throughout the day.
- Try to reduce the stress in your life. Complementary therapies like tai chi, yoga or meditation can help, as can getting outside.

“ After my surgery, I started light work in the garden. The sunshine helped me to feel more positive and I'm sure the fresh air and oxygen helped my body to recover and my appetite to return. ~ Mona

## Special diets

It can be hard to eat well during cancer treatment if you have to limit or avoid some foods because of a health condition (like diabetes, heart disease, food allergies or celiac disease). It can also be hard if you're following a special diet (like vegan, vegetarian or gluten-free).

A registered dietitian can help you find ways to eat well and meet your special dietary needs throughout your cancer treatment.

### An alternative diet is not a cure-all

You may wonder if an alternative diet can cure your cancer. There is no scientific evidence that any specific food or diet (for example, the alkaline diet, a macrobiotic diet or the Gerson therapy diet) can cure cancer. Because these diets often restrict food choices (like meat, milk, eggs and even vegetables and fruit) they may not provide enough calories, protein, vitamins and minerals. This can lead to weight loss and poor nutrition.

If you're considering an unconventional or alternative diet, talk to your healthcare team.

## Fluids

As you focus on eating well, it's easy to forget about fluids. Yet every cell in your body needs water. If there are days when you can't eat solids, it's even more important to drink plenty of liquids. They can provide much needed calories and keep you from becoming dehydrated.

Do your best to drink plenty of water and other fluids each day. When it's hot outside or you're active, you'll need to drink even more. You'll also need to drink more if you have a fever, are vomiting or have diarrhea. Your dietitian can give you specific guidelines on how much is right for you.



We were told if he became dehydrated, he wouldn't be able to continue treatment. So I would always keep liquids beside the bed. I would have Ensure and I would have water so he could choose. I would put straws in it so it's easy to drink. Little tricks like that make a big difference. ~ Holly (caregiver)

### > TIPS

- Carry a bottle, travel mug or thermos with your favourite fluid wherever you go.
- Instead of coffee, tea or sodas, choose water, juice and milk or milk alternatives like soy, rice or almond beverages.
- Take small sips throughout the day if you find it hard to drink a full glass at once.
- If you're losing too much weight, drink most of your fluids between meals. Drinking at mealtimes can make you feel full and then you eat less.



I swear that towards the end of radiation/chemo I could barely even drink water, yet I knew I needed to be hydrated. Popsicles were the answer. I needed to be on a low-residue diet so couldn't have anything with real fruit purée. I think it was frozen cranapple juice that worked the best. Even purchased popsicles were good. I am so grateful to the nurse who suggested it. ~ Elizabeth Wellburn, cancer survivor

Remember that some foods provide fluids as well. These include soups, popsicles, gelatin desserts, pudding, ice cream and sherbet. Also try some vegetables and fruit like celery, cucumbers, lettuce, watermelon, cantaloupe and oranges.

## What to watch for – signs of dehydration

Dehydration means there is not enough water in your body. You may be dehydrated if you:

- are thirsty
- have dry skin or a dry mouth
- don't have tears when you cry
- urinate less often, with small amounts of dark-coloured urine
- are dizzy

Sometimes you can't drink enough or are losing too much fluid because of vomiting or diarrhea. You may need extra fluids and electrolytes (minerals that can affect the amount of water in your body).

If you think you might be dehydrated, talk to your healthcare team right away.

## Alcohol

You may wonder if it's okay to drink alcohol during your cancer treatment. Before you choose to drink alcohol, talk to your healthcare team. Alcohol can interfere with some cancer treatments and medicines. And drinking increases your risk of developing some types of cancer. If you choose to drink alcohol, keep it to less than 1 drink a day for women and less than 2 drinks a day for men.

If it doesn't interfere with your treatment, some people find that having a drink increases their appetite and helps them enjoy a meal. But for others, alcohol makes them feel full so they don't eat enough.

## Eating well on a budget

As you figure out which foods are best for you during cancer treatment, the last thing you want to worry about is money. But eating well doesn't have to cost a lot. You can find ways to eat healthy without spending too much.

### > TIPS

- Plan healthy meals and snacks for a week, then make a shopping list and stick to it.
- Eat fewer processed, packaged foods. These are often more expensive and less nutritious than fresh foods.
- When you see foods on sale that will last a long time, buy extra. Dried or frozen foods will keep for a long time. And you can buy grains like brown rice, quinoa, oats or whole wheat pasta in large amounts.
- Buy fresh fruit and vegetables when they're in season or on sale, then cut them up and store them in the freezer. Frozen, dried and canned produce is just as good as fresh. Look for lower-sodium canned vegetables and fruit packed in juice, not syrup.



I buy BC nectarines in season and cut and freeze them in snack-size freezer bags. It's perfect for a smoothie mixed along with a banana (fresh or frozen). ~ Betty Wessner, caregiver

- Buy whole grain breads, pita or tortillas on sale and store them in the freezer.
- Try meatless meals twice a week. Soy, beans, lentils and other legumes are good sources of protein.
- Buy dairy alternatives like soy or almond beverages when you see them on sale. They usually last longer in the fridge than cow's milk.
- Buy chicken with skin on and bone in. You can remove these yourself at home.



- Buy frozen fish, shrimp and other seafood instead of fresh. Canned tuna or salmon is another less expensive option.
- Buy blocks of cheese and shred or slice them at home.
- Raw nuts usually cost less. You can roast them in the oven or in a pan on the stove and then store them in the freezer or a well-sealed container in the fridge.
- Fill a spritzer bottle with oil and use it for cooking. This uses less oil.
- Cook food in batches and freeze. This saves time as well as money. You can use leftovers to make soups and casseroles to eat over the next day or so.
- Consider growing some of your own ingredients. If you don't have a garden, you can plant some easy-to-grow herbs or tomatoes in a window box.



## Feelings can affect your appetite during treatment

During cancer treatment, you may find yourself feeling sad, helpless, anxious, afraid or angry. You are not alone. Many people with cancer have these feelings – and find different ways to manage them.



How you feel can affect your eating. Strong feelings can ruin your appetite and make you lose interest in food.

Or they could affect you in the opposite way, and you may find you want to eat a lot.

Feelings can use up your energy so you don't feel like cooking or grocery shopping. And if you're the family member who usually prepares meals, it may feel strange not to be able to do this.

You might still try to push yourself to cook even if you become very tired. But this is the time to let people help you with things like grocery shopping and cooking. If you don't have friends or family nearby, a social worker can arrange for home care, Meals on Wheels or other local organizations to help with cooking, shopping and other chores.

“ If you try to do too much you can end up so exhausted. Don't feel like you have to conquer the world. Let your body heal itself before you try to take on all those things your mind thinks you should be doing. ~ Dante

Sometimes your feelings about eating can change because of how your body changes. When you are losing or gaining weight, you may find it hard to accept how you look. If there are many types of food you can't eat, you may start to feel self-conscious about eating out or eating with friends or family.

“ I couldn't eat much from a restaurant menu, so eating out with my husband became an even more rare event than before. I guess that wasn't a mood change, but a lifestyle change. But it does sometimes make me angry that I can't just go out and enjoy a meal with my family or my friends. ~ Mona

If your emotions are making it hard to cope, it can help to talk with someone you trust. You might want to talk to a close friend or family member, a religious or spiritual leader or a counsellor.

Many people find that talking to other people with cancer, either one-on-one, in a support group or online, is very helpful. It can really help to know that other people have been where you are now. Try joining a support group, where you can share your feelings and pick up some ideas about coping with changes in your appetite and eating.



### The Canadian Cancer Society: Helping you find support

Contact the Canadian Cancer Society to find out about support groups and other services in your community. We can also put you in touch with one of our trained volunteers who understands what you're going through.

- Call us toll-free Monday to Friday at 1-888-939-3333 (TTY 1-866-786-3934).
- Email us at [info@cis.cancer.ca](mailto:info@cis.cancer.ca).
- Visit our website at [cancer.ca](http://cancer.ca).

### Want to connect with someone online?

Our online community – [CancerConnection.ca](http://CancerConnection.ca) – helps people with cancer and their loved ones share their experiences and build supportive relationships. There are discussions, blogs and groups that may interest you. Connecting with others who understand your situation and how you feel can help you cope.

### > TIPS

- Learn about eating problems before treatment starts. You might feel more in control when you know what to expect.
- Consider meditation or prayer. They help many people feel calm and less stressed.
- Recognize that your emotions will come and go. Even if your feelings are strong today, you may feel better tomorrow.





## Being active can help

You may not always feel like being active. But it can really help if you're active when you can be. In fact, many doctors now encourage people with cancer to be as active as possible. That's because physical activity can help you feel better, give your appetite a boost and help control cravings for less healthy foods.

Being active can also:

- ease side effects like fatigue
- help you have a healthy body weight
- help you sleep better
- boost your self-esteem and reduce anxiety and depression
- improve your quality of life
- help you regain your strength and recover after treatment
- reduce stress



How much physical activity you can do will depend on your overall health, how you cope with treatment and what side effects you have. Some people – for example, people who have had breast surgery – are given specific exercises to follow as part of their recovery.

“ I walked a lot after the surgery. And once I was through the worst of the chemo, I decided to do a 5k run. I started really slowly and worked my way up. Even though I was tired after going through the chemo and starting radiation, it is true that it helps give you energy. ~ Zara

No matter what kind of activity you're interested in, it's important to check with your doctor before you start. This is true even if you exercised regularly before your cancer diagnosis. Although exercise is safe for many people, there are some exceptions.

After your doctor has said it's okay for you to be more active, you can ask for help from a physiotherapist or other healthcare professional with experience in this area. They will work with you to develop an exercise program that is right for you – and safe, effective and fun.

If you've never been physically active before, start slow and gradually increase how much you move. And during those times when you don't feel able to exercise, go easy on yourself. The goal is to be as active as you can comfortably be.

“ There may be things that people just aren't going to be able to do anymore. If you were a marathon runner and you have lung cancer, maybe you're never going to run a marathon again, but that doesn't mean you can't run. You just have to set a different objective. I think that's important for people to understand. There are still lots of things you can do. I virtually do everything today that I did before. I just don't do it as fast or as hard. ~ Dante

### > TIPS

- Talk to your doctor before getting active. Gentle exercise like a slow walk, stretching or swimming is usually okay.
- For more vigorous activities (like heavy gardening, shovelling, running or lifting weights), it's very important to talk to your doctor first.
- Try to be active when your energy level is highest.
- Find an indoor place, such as a local mall, to walk when the weather is bad.
- Try parking farther away from the doctor's office or grocery store so you can get in some short walks. Even a few extra steps can add up!

## If you are gaining weight

Many people with cancer expect to lose weight and are surprised, or upset, when they gain weight. You may find you gain weight because of frequent snacking to control nausea or anxiety during treatment. Or you can gain weight if your activity levels change because of fatigue. Some cancer treatments can also cause weight gain – including hormonal therapy, steroids and any treatments that cause women to go into early menopause.

“ I became a bit obsessed about it. Now again, I’ve gained a bit more weight. But I don’t weigh myself as much only because I’m on that trial and they weigh me so I know how much I weigh. At first I was just like, you know what, you’re doing the best you can. You’re not going to be perfect. So, I’m trying to get back to where I was before where I’m just trying to eat healthily, allow myself a treat, work out, do the best I can. ~ Chantal

### > TIPS

- Eat smaller portions and plan your meals around vegetables, fruit, whole grains and legumes like beans. These are low in calories and high in fibre so they help you feel full.
- Limit salty foods. Salt causes the body to retain (hold on to) water.
- Use low-fat cooking methods like boiling or steaming rather than frying.
- Cut back on butter, margarine, mayonnaise and salad dressing. These have a lot of fat and calories.
- Choose lower-fat milk and dairy products that are either skim or no more than 2% milk fat (MF). Choose hard cheeses with no more than 20% MF.
- Don’t skip meals. This may cause you to overeat later.
- Be more physically active if you can.

## If you are losing weight

“ I dropped 29 pounds during my treatment and went down to 129 pounds. It was brutal! I could barely sit down. I had to sit on 2 pillows. It was a lot of weight and I lost it all within 5 and a half weeks. ~ Dante

If you are losing weight, know that you are not alone. During cancer treatment, many people find it hard to eat enough. You may lose your appetite or feel like eating has become a chore. At times like this, it’s important to find ways to get calories and protein into your diet.

Sometimes it helps to change the way you eat. If you’re used to eating large meals, try smaller amounts more often during the day. Snacking is a good way to get the calories and nutrients your body needs. Healthy snacks – like cut-up vegetables or fruit, yogurt, nuts and dried fruits – can also boost your energy between meals.



“ He resisted eating. I would boil an egg, cut it and leave it beside the bed. I would cut up watermelon and cantaloupe and put toothpicks in it. He would pick at a little bit of this or that. ~ Holly (caregiver)

### > TIPS

- Make every mouthful count. Choose foods and drinks that are high in protein and calories.
- Eat small amounts every 1 to 2 hours. Stock your cupboards with quick, easy snacks that you can eat any time.
- Eat well when your energy level is highest. Make the most of your good days.

- Eat your favourite foods at any time of the day. Eat breakfast foods at dinnertime if you feel like it. Even if you can only eat 1 or 2 foods, stick with them until you're able to eat more.
- Be active, if you can. A walk before meals can help increase your appetite.
- Don't worry if on a bad day you find you can't eat at all. But talk to your healthcare team if you can't eat for more than 2 days in a row.
- Try to be patient. Most eating problems are temporary.



### Tofu cube soup

Very easy to make and, best of all, easy to digest. Take firm tofu and cut into cubes – whatever amount you wish. Take some soup broth (cube or dry mix where you just add water or homemade) and enough water to make a single serving of soup. Boil the broth, stir and then add tofu cubes. Sit back with a favourite magazine, sip and enjoy. ~ Rose

## Getting enough calories

Someone with cancer and undergoing treatment may need more calories (energy) than usual. They're found in carbohydrates (including vegetables and fruit, bread, pasta and legumes) and in fats (like margarine, oils, nuts, seeds, avocado, fish, meats, poultry – chicken, turkey – and milk products). Some foods are higher in calories than others.

“ What I enjoyed most were creamed soups with lots of milk and cream in them – cream of broccoli, cream of asparagus blended up so there was nothing chunky. I had a lot of smoothies because they went down easy. I'd make a smoothie for breakfast – throw in some fruit, yogurt and almond milk and blend it up. ~ Dante

### To add calories to your meals and snacks:

ADD	TO
Avocado, mayonnaise or salad dressing	Sandwich fillings, salads, dips or sauces for raw or cooked vegetables
Nuts and seeds	Cereal, recipes for baked goods, stir-fries
Peanut butter or other nut butter	Smoothies, bagels, muffins, breadsticks
1%, 2% or whole milk, skim milk powder, soy or almond beverage	Cream soups, cereal, milkshakes, mashed potatoes, cheese sauces, recipes for baked goods, desserts, scrambled eggs, pancakes, hot chocolate
Yogurt or sour cream (with at least 3% MF), dairy alternatives	Dips and salad dressings, fruit, perogies, potatoes, soups, sauces
Whipping cream, table cream, whipped topping	Puddings, custard, cake, pie, gelatin
Ice cream and other frozen desserts	Fruit, milkshakes, cake, pie, gelatin desserts
Butter, non-hydrogenated margarine, vegetable oil, olive oil	Soups, mashed potatoes, hot cereals, rice, pasta, cooked vegetables
Hard cheese (pasteurized)	Scrambled eggs, sandwiches, potatoes, cream soups, sauces, stews, casseroles, tortillas
Cream cheese (pasteurized)	Crackers, breads, bagels
Granola	Cereal, yogurt, fruit, smoothies
Dried fruit	Cereal, recipes for baked goods, nuts and seeds (make your own trail mix)
Jam, sugar, syrups, honey (pasteurized)	Breads, crackers, muffins, cereal, pancakes, desserts

“ Avocados were a big hit – high in calories and nutrition value, easy to digest and mild in flavour. ~ Frehiwot (caregiver)

## Getting enough protein

Protein is good for your health in many ways. It helps your body grow cells, heal tissue and maintain a healthy immune system. And it can help you avoid infection and recover more quickly. The key is to know where to find it.

“ The nutritionists emphasized that I needed to keep my protein intake up in order to recover well from the surgery. I asked for and was given lists of the protein contents in many foods that I had been able to eat. I learned to make soups that contained milk, yogurt, cheddar cheese and I used a lot of tofu to supplement my protein intake. I still make a mean cheesy broccoli soup! ~ Mona



### To add protein to your meals and snacks:

ADD	TO
Nuts and seeds	Casseroles, breads, muffins, cookies, salads, ice cream
Legumes (beans, chickpeas, lentils)	Salads, dips, soups, pasta, rice, stews, casseroles
Legumes, puréed	Veggie dips, sandwiches, crackers, veggies
Cheese – sliced, grated	Soups, mashed potatoes, vegetables, sauces, meatloaf, chili, breads
Cottage cheese	Sauces, scrambled eggs, casseroles
Skim, 1%, 2% or whole milk (instead of water)	Hot cereal, soups, casseroles, hot chocolate
Skim milk powder, 2-4 tbsp for each cup of liquid or semi-solid food (30-60 mL for each 250 mL)	Regular milk and milk drinks, mashed potatoes, hot cereal, cream soups, casseroles, meatloaf, breads, muffins, sauces, puddings, custard
Yogurt	Fruit, soups, dips
Tofu	Soups, curries, stews, stir-fries
Soy beverages	Smoothies, soups, hot cereal, puddings
Peanut butter or other nut butters	Fruit slices, celery, toast, muffins, crackers, ice cream, milkshakes
Cut-up cooked meat, poultry (chicken, turkey) or fish	Salads, soups, scrambled eggs, quiches, baked potatoes, pasta
Hard-boiled eggs	Salads, sandwiches, vegetables, potatoes
Eggs or egg substitute	Meat or veggie loaf, cooked cereals, macaroni and cheese, chicken or tuna salad, French toast, pancakes

## Managing eating-related side effects

Eating-related side effects are common during cancer treatment. This is because cancer treatments can damage some of your healthy cells along with the cancer cells. Some other medicines and the cancer itself can also prevent you from eating well.



No one can predict how many side effects you will experience or how strongly you will feel them. It varies from person to person and even from one day to the next. This can all be pretty frustrating. It may take some time to figure out what will help. But these side effects are usually temporary. Once treatment ends, you should gradually get back to eating normally again.

“ I tried everything. I’m a stubborn so-and-so and I don’t give up easily. I just knew if I didn’t eat I wasn’t going to survive.  
~ Dante

### Anemia

Anemia is a reduction in the number of healthy red blood cells in your body. Without enough red blood cells, your body tissues don’t get enough oxygen to do their jobs properly. This can leave you feeling tired, dizzy or short of breath.

Some cancer treatments can cause anemia. It can also be caused by a lack of nutrients in your diet. Your healthcare team may prescribe iron supplements, folic acid pills or vitamin B12. Eating foods high in iron (such as red meats, dried beans or fruit, almonds, broccoli, and enriched breads and cereals) or folic acid (found in enriched breads and cereals, asparagus, broccoli, spinach and legumes like lima beans) can also help. And you can get B12 from meats and some meat alternatives (fish, poultry and eggs).

## Changes in taste or smell

You may find your senses of taste and smell change during cancer treatment. Some foods may have less taste than usual. Or they may taste sweeter than usual or have a bitter or metallic taste.

“ My oncologist told me to eat what I wanted during my treatment because it was difficult to eat anything with the constant bad taste in my mouth. She wanted me to enjoy myself. Frozen fruits and frozen yogurt, that was pretty good! I drank lots of flavoured water to help with the bad taste and my very dry mouth. ~ Lena

### > TIPS

- Try rinsing your mouth before and after eating. This will help clear your taste buds. You can use club soda or a mixture of salt with water.
- Keep your mouth and teeth clean. If your mouth is sore, your family doctor or dentist can suggest gentle ways of cleaning your teeth.
- Serve foods cold or at room temperature. This will help reduce strong tastes and smells.
- Add your favourite seasonings and spices to make food taste better. Try onion, garlic, chili powder, barbecue sauce, mustard or ketchup, and herbs like basil, oregano, rosemary, mint and tarragon.
- Suck on lemon candies or mints, or chew gum. This helps get rid of bad tastes after you’ve eaten.





### Metallic tastes

- Try using plastic cutlery and glass cooking pots.
- Add tart flavours from lemons and other citrus fruit, vinegar and pickled foods (except if you have a sore mouth).
- Use sweeteners like maple syrup or agave nectar.

“ For me, the things that helped – because you always have a metallic taste in your mouth – were tomatoes and tomato sauce. I’m a survivor since 3 years ago and everything is okay now. ~ Quinn

“ She was conscious of always having a beverage by her side – water or tea. This helped with the metallic taste in her mouth. ~ Frehiwot (caregiver)

### Bitter tastes

- Add a little honey or sugar to foods.
- Add sweet fruit to meals.
- Drink ginger ale or mint tea.

### Sweet tastes

- Dilute fruit juice and other sweet drinks with water or ice.
- Try vegetables instead of fruit.
- Add a little salt or lemon juice to foods.
- Sip and then hold herbal tea for a moment in your mouth before you eat. This can help make your taste buds less sensitive to sweet foods.



## Constipation

Constipation can be caused by cancer and its treatments and some medicines. It can also happen because of changes in your activity levels, your eating habits or how much fluid you’re drinking. If you are constipated, talk to your healthcare team. They may recommend a stool softener or laxative.

### > TIPS

- Gradually add more fibre to your diet. Some examples of high-fibre foods are whole grains, whole grain breads and cereals, brown rice, vegetables and fruit, beans and other legumes, dried fruit such as prunes and raisins, seeds and nuts.
- Drink plenty of liquids throughout the day. Try water or fruit and vegetable juices. Hot or warm liquids like cocoa, tea or lemon water can also help.
- Check the labels on cereal boxes. Look for more than 4 grams of fibre per serving.
- Choose foods that are natural laxatives like prunes, rhubarb and papaya. Try eating 1/4 cup (60 mL) of prunes or drinking 1/2 cup (125 mL) of prune juice.
- Add small amounts of bran to cereal, cooking or baking.
- Be more physically active if and when you can.



### Olive oil and honey

During the chemo treatment and radiation, 1 tsp olive oil and 1 tsp honey first thing in the morning prevented constipation. ~ Dalia Mleik, cancer survivor



During the chemo treatments, I was very constipated. So, every morning I prepared this simple recipe. A small probiotic yogurt mixed with a full teaspoon of crushed (important) flax seeds to extract the oil. That’s it. Simple and efficient! ~ Lyne Desormeaux, cancer survivor

## Diarrhea

Some cancer treatments and medicines can cause loose, frequent stools. Your healthcare team may suggest medicines to take.

### > TIPS

- Drink plenty of non-carbonated, caffeine-free fluids such as water, sports drinks and clear broth. They will help prevent you from becoming dehydrated.
- Eat small meals and snacks often throughout the day.
- Choose foods that are low in fibre. Examples include white bread and pasta, bananas, melons, applesauce, mashed potatoes or baked potatoes without the skin, meat, poultry and fish.
- Choose salty foods like soups, sports drinks, crackers and pretzels to replace sodium lost from the diarrhea.
- Choose foods that are high in potassium such as bananas, oranges, fruit juices and nectars.
- Limit greasy, fried, spicy or sugary foods.
- Avoid sugarless gum and candies made with sorbitol, which acts like a laxative.
- Stay away from foods that are natural laxatives. These include prunes and prune juice, rhubarb and papaya.
- Limit milk and milk products if they make your diarrhea worse.
- Check with your doctor or dietitian before trying sports drinks (with electrolytes) to help with your diarrhea.

### What to watch for – diarrhea

Talk to your doctor if you have diarrhea and it:

- continues for more than 24 hours
- causes pain in your abdomen (stomach or middle area)
- causes cramping

## Dry mouth or thick saliva

Some cancer treatments and medicines can cause dry mouth or thick saliva, which can make eating more difficult.

“ The radiation dried up my saliva glands. Now when I eat drier foods I really have to wash them down. I try to avoid dry foods like pork chops or roast beef. The best foods are spaghetti, which goes down easy, soups and cooked vegetables. What I learned was, I could eat the majority of things but the eating process is slow. I have to chew my food much longer, take smaller forkfuls and take a sip of water or tea after almost every mouthful. ~ Dante

### > TIPS

- Add moisture to solid foods by adding broth, soup, sauces, gravy, creams, butter or margarine. You can also blend foods into a purée.
- Add butter or margarine to warm muffins for moisture. Or try dipping crackers in soup until soft.
- Make sure rice is well cooked if you use it in a side dish or in rice pudding.
- Take sips of fluid when you eat to make chewing easier.
- Sip fluids often throughout the day. Try water, juices and nectars, soups, milk or milk products, herbal teas, popsicles and gelatin. But limit drinks with caffeine like coffee, black tea and some soft drinks. Caffeine can dry out your mouth.
- Take your favourite fluid with you everywhere you go in a bottle, travel mug or thermos.
- Sip on club soda or ice water to help loosen thick saliva. You can also try sucking on ice chips or popsicles.
- Make smoothies thinner with ice, water or juice if you find they coat your mouth.

- Keep your mouth clean by using a soft-bristle toothbrush and rinsing often throughout the day (especially before and after you eat).
- Ask your healthcare team if using a humidifier in your home is right for you and could help keep your throat less dry.

“ I found that if I could have gravy with my potatoes or meat, then I could eat the rest of the meal because the gravy made everything slippery and I could swallow it. ~ Mona

## Fatigue

At times, you may feel very tired or find it hard to be as active as you usually are. This can make it harder to shop for groceries, prepare food or even eat a meal. A diet rich in calories and protein can help boost your energy.

### > TIPS

- Eat small amounts of food throughout the day, even if you're not hungry.
- Eat when you have the most energy.
- Drink plenty of fluids to stay hydrated.
- Choose convenient foods like frozen meals, canned foods or takeout until you have more energy.
- When you have the energy, cook in batches. Freeze in portions that can be easily reheated.
- Buy pre-cut vegetables to save time and energy when preparing meals or snacks.
- Try a healthy drink if you don't feel well enough to prepare or eat a meal. You can make a smoothie by blending bananas, peaches, strawberries or other soft fruit (fresh or frozen) with milk, fruit juice, yogurt or a milk alternative (like an almond beverage) in a blender.
- Ask friends and family to help with grocery shopping and preparing meals. Your local store might also deliver groceries.
- Ask your dietitian or social worker about community resources like Meals on Wheels or frozen meal programs.

## Food cravings or dislikes

“ I definitely had food aversions, particularly around certain textures – bought a can of pea soup, tried to eat it and found the texture too mushy. I had 2 spoonfuls and thought, I can't eat this. It was a lot of experimenting. Raw vegetables were usually fine but cooked ones could be a turnoff. ~ Zara

You may find that you suddenly crave some foods or don't want to eat foods that you used to enjoy. These cravings and dislikes can change over time, even from day to day.

### > TIPS

- Eat healthy foods and foods you like when your appetite is good. Dislikes will pass.
- Use food cravings to your advantage by including the foods you crave in healthy meals and snacks. For example, chocolate can be used in a milkshake, in banana bread or as a dip for fruit.
- Keep a stash of your favourite snacks around so you can nibble even if you don't feel like eating.
- Take a break from your favourite foods when you're feeling nauseous or vomiting. This will keep you from linking these foods to feeling sick.
- Add extra seasonings if foods taste too bland or to mask unpleasant tastes.

## Gas, bloating or cramping

Some treatments and medicines may cause gas, bloating or cramping. Gas can also be a sign of constipation, so make sure you're emptying your bowel regularly.

### > TIPS

- Eat small, frequent meals or snacks throughout the day.
- Limit drinks and foods that can cause gas or bloating. These include carbonated drinks, beer, spinach, broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, turnip, squash, cucumbers, lettuce, peppers, beans, garlic, peas and onions.
- Sip fluids slowly and don't use a straw for drinking.
- Avoid chewing gum.
- Try gentle exercise, like walking. It may bring you some relief.

### If you're milk- or lactose-intolerant

Sometimes abdominal surgery, radiation to the abdomen or chemotherapy can make it harder to digest milk and milk products. This can make you feel bloated and cause cramps and diarrhea.

### TIPS

- Try smaller portions of milk or cheese to see if you can eat them without upsetting your bowel. Buttermilk, yogurt and aged cheese may be easier for your body to handle than other milk or milk products.
- Try low-lactose or lactose-free milk alternatives made with soy or rice.
- Talk to a registered dietitian if you think you are milk- or lactose-intolerant.

## Heartburn and reflux

“ In the early days, if I ate anything acidic it burned. I couldn't eat tomato sauce with my spaghetti because it would burn. That lasted 6 to 8 months then slowly started to go away.  
~ Dante

Heartburn and reflux can leave a burning feeling in your throat and upper stomach or leave a sour taste in your mouth. This can cause enough discomfort that you lose interest in eating. It can also cause nausea and vomiting. Your healthcare team may suggest medicines to help relieve these symptoms.

### > TIPS

- Limit foods that are spicy or high in fat as well as acidic foods like citrus fruit and tomato products.
- Limit how much alcohol you drink and how much caffeine you get from products such as soft drinks, coffee, tea and chocolate.
- Eat small meals often rather than larger meals 3 times a day.
- Try not to lie down right after eating.
- Wait 30 minutes after eating before drinking any fluids.
- Wait 2 to 3 hours after eating before going to bed.
- At bedtime or when you are resting, keep your head and shoulders propped up with an extra pillow.
- Wear loose, comfortable clothing.

## Nausea and vomiting

“ On my worst treatment days, the foods that I was able to tolerate were mashed potatoes, toasted English muffins and boiled eggs. Yep, bland, but at least it stayed down! ~ Lesley

Many people have nausea and vomiting during their cancer treatment. If this happens to you, talk to your healthcare team. Your doctor can prescribe anti-nausea drugs. Different drugs work for different people and you may need more than one drug to feel better. Work with your healthcare team to find the ones that work best for you.

It's often easier to prevent nausea than to treat it after it starts. So if your doctor prescribes anti-nausea drugs for you, follow the instructions you're given, even if you don't feel nauseous yet.

### > TIPS

- Eat smaller meals more often throughout the day. And eat slowly.
- Nibble on dry foods like crackers, toast, cereal or bread sticks every few hours during the day. Keep dry foods by your bed so you can eat a bit before you fall asleep or when you wake up if it makes your stomach feel better.
- Avoid foods that are very sweet, greasy, fried or spicy, or that have a strong smell.
- If food smells make you nauseous, let other people do the cooking. Try eating meals cold or at room temperature. They will smell less strong. You can also try eating in a well-ventilated room with no cooking odours. Open a window or use a fan to get plenty of fresh air.
- Sip water and other liquids (ginger ale, sports drinks, broth or herbal teas) throughout the day. Cool or lukewarm liquids may be easier to drink than hot or cold liquids.

- Figure out what triggers nausea for you and avoid these triggers as much as possible. These may include specific foods, smells, events or a time of day.
- Have a light meal or snack before your treatment. If nausea usually occurs during treatment, try not eating for an hour or 2 beforehand. Then wait a few hours after treatment before eating again.
- Rinse your mouth often with water or club soda to remove unpleasant tastes.
- Keep your mouth clean by brushing your teeth at least twice a day.
- After eating, relax sitting up or with your head and shoulders raised if you need to lie down.

“ Anything too rich was not good for me. But smoothies were my friend. They definitely helped with the nausea. Everything else just seemed to change day to day. Herbal teas helped too, especially lemon and ginger. Using fresh fruit was pretty easy, especially during strawberry season. Sometimes a bit of Greek yogurt, almond milk. ~ Zara

### What to watch for – vomiting

Call your healthcare team if you can't stop vomiting or can't keep liquids down for more than 24 hours after your treatment.



## Sore mouth or throat

Talk to your healthcare team if a sore mouth or throat is making it difficult for you to eat or drink. They can recommend medicines to make chewing and swallowing less painful.

### > TIPS

- Eat soft, bland food that is cool or lukewarm rather than very hot or cold. Also avoid hot or cold drinks. Try soup, mashed potatoes, yogurt, eggs, custard, pudding, cooked cereals, ice cream, casseroles, milkshakes and commercial nutrition supplements.
- Use a straw when you drink. Try fruit nectars like pear, peach or apricot rather than acidic fruit juices or alcohol.
- Limit foods that are tart, salty or spicy or have rough edges (like toast and hard tacos).
- Rinse your mouth often. Try a few different rinses to see what works best for you. Ask your healthcare team or pharmacist to recommend mouthwashes that are alcohol-free and can soothe a sore mouth and throat. Your healthcare team may also suggest a recipe you can make yourself. Salt or baking soda mixed with water or club soda is cheaper than store-bought mouthwashes.

“ I had a couple of times when I could feel mouth sores starting. It felt like when you bite the inside of your mouth really hard. Anything I ate after that would sting so I wanted to get rid of it as fast as I could. I started rinsing with warm water and salt. That got rid of it. ~ Zara

## Swallowing difficulties

During cancer treatment, you may find it harder to chew or swallow. Talk to your healthcare team if you're coughing or feel like you're choking when you eat or drink.

### > TIPS

- Try different food textures to find ones that you can swallow easily. Foods with a smooth texture like mashed potatoes are often easiest.
- Try soft tortillas instead of bread. The texture may make it easier to swallow.
- Use a blender or food processor to chop foods that are difficult to chew. Use fruit or vegetable juices, broth or milk to blend the food together.
- Take small bites of food and completely swallow each bite before starting the next one.
- Thicken liquids to make them easier to swallow. You can add gelatin, puréed vegetables or fruit, instant potatoes, cornstarch, infant rice cereal or commercial thickeners.
- Soften dry, crisp foods like crackers or biscuits by dipping them into milk, coffee or tea.
- Limit spicy foods and hot spices like chili powder, pepper or curry powder. These can irritate the inside of the mouth and throat.

“ I found a warm tea went down better than anything else. It loosened any phlegm and made it easier to swallow. And steel-cut oats for breakfast – I just made it very mushy, very wet. ~ Dante

## Food safety

When you have cancer, you need to be especially careful about how you handle and prepare food. That's because cancer and its treatments can weaken your immune system. And a weaker immune system makes it harder for your body to fight infections caused by bacteria and other organisms that can grow in food.



A registered dietitian can help you make food choices that are safest for you. They will watch you closely for signs of a weakened immune system. And they can help with any concerns or questions you have about food safety.

### Shopping for food

- Read food labels carefully. Don't buy any food past its "best before" or expiry date.
- Buy only pasteurized, refrigerated milk and dairy products. Juices and honey should also be pasteurized.
- Keep raw meat, poultry, seafood and eggs separate from other foods in your grocery cart.
- Pick up perishable foods last, and then go right home from the grocery store and put them in the fridge.
- Don't buy food from bulk bins.

## Preparing food

- Wash your hands, knives, cutting boards and countertops with warm soapy water before and after you use them. This is especially important with meat, poultry and fish.
- Use separate cutting boards for raw foods and cooked foods. Throw away worn cutting boards.
- Wash the top lids of canned foods with soap and water before opening.
- Use different spoons for tasting and for stirring while you cook.
- Don't use sponges to clean up. They are hard to keep bacteria-free. Use paper towels, or if you use dishcloths, change them every day and wash in the hot cycle of the washing machine.

### Vegetables and fruit

- Wash all vegetables and fruit thoroughly under running water. If they have rough surfaces (for example, melons), scrub them before cutting.
- Cut away any bruised or damaged areas. Bacteria can thrive in these places.
- Rinse packaged salads and pre-cut veggies under running water even when they are marked "pre-washed."

### Meat, fish, poultry and eggs

- Thaw meat, fish or poultry (chicken, turkey) in the refrigerator or defrost them in the microwave. Don't leave them sitting on the counter to thaw.
- Cook thoroughly. You should see no traces of pink inside. Use a thermometer to make sure meat is cooked to the correct temperature.
- Eggs should be cooked hard, not runny.

## Storing food

- Use defrosted foods right away and do not refreeze them.
- Keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold. Put leftovers in the refrigerator as soon as you're finished eating.
- Put hot foods, uncovered, in the refrigerator to cool. Place in sealed storage containers after cooling.
- Throw out all prepared foods after 3 days in the refrigerator. Also throw out entire food packages or containers with any mould. This includes yogurt, cheese, vegetables and fruit, jelly, bread and pastries.
- Foods and drinks that are past their "best before" or expiry date should not be kept. Also throw out opened foods after a few days, even if the expiry date is still okay.

### Food and drinks to avoid

- raw foods such as eggs (including raw eggs in homemade Caesar salad dressing), sushi and uncooked oysters
- meat, poultry, tofu, fish that are undercooked (make sure they are well cooked)
- salad dressings and other bottled products that are open in the fridge if you don't know how long they've been there
- mouldy cheeses like roquefort and blue cheese
- home-canned vegetables, fruit, meats and fish
- foods and drinks from salad bars, buffets, potlucks and sidewalk vendors
- well water, unless tested yearly and found safe

Your dietitian may suggest other foods for you to avoid, depending on your situation.

## When you just can't cook

We all think about cooking a little differently. For some, it's a passion, for others a chore. But during cancer treatment, your feelings about cooking can change. It may lose all its appeal. Or you may not feel like it sometimes. You might be too tired, or the cooking smells might bother you too much. You may also find that treatments and doctors' visits take up so much of your day that you don't have time to prepare meals.

“ If I felt down or tired, I would sometimes just have a bottle of Ensure for a meal instead of going through the effort of preparing the food. ~ Mona

### Make every meal doable

If cooking and eating seem like an ordeal, do what you can to keep meals simple. Plan ahead by filling your refrigerator, cupboards and freezer with healthy foods you can eat any time without much food prep. Make sure to include foods you can eat even when you feel unwell. These may include:

- cereals
- crackers, crispbreads and rice cakes
- dried fruit
- gravy and stock cubes
- canned tuna, salmon and sardines
- pasta and rice
- soup
- jams, nut butters
- nuts, seeds
- honey (pasteurized)
- pickles



Stock up on ready-to-serve foods that need little or no cooking, like frozen dinners. When you have the energy, cook foods ahead of time and freeze them in meal-size portions.

You may also consider using community resources like Meals on Wheels or homemaking services where someone comes in to your home to make meals for you.

## How family and friends can help

If you just don't feel like shopping and cooking, this is the time to accept help from others. It's not always easy to ask for or accept offers of help. But you'll find family and friends are usually happy to do what they can to make your life easier.

You can ask them to help you in different ways:

- Shop for groceries using a list you've prepared. Or you might be able to pay a teen or student in your neighbourhood to shop for you.
- Stock your cupboards with basic foods that last a long time.
- Drop off fresh foods like vegetables and fruit a couple of times a week. Ask for help washing and cutting any produce you feel like eating soon.
- Bake snacks that can be frozen and then thawed when you're ready to eat them. Muffins and quick breads can include nuts, seeds or dried fruit to make every bite count.
- Bring a simple meal – like a casserole or soup and salad – for you and your family to eat that evening.
- Prepare food in batches for you. Foods like tomato sauce, soups, stews, curries, quiches and even pancakes can be frozen in single-serving containers and thawed when you want them.

## When you just can't eat

There may be times when you feel you just can't eat. Maybe the nausea is especially bad. Or swallowing has become too difficult for you. At times like this, it can be hard to meet all your nutrition needs. If you can't eat for more than a couple of days or if you've started to lose weight, talk to your healthcare team. They might suggest some of the following alternatives for a short time.

### Commercial nutrition supplements

Commercial nutrition supplements are a good source of calories and nutrients. They come in a variety of flavours and forms, including a ready-to-use beverage (similar to a milkshake), a powder, a pudding and a bar. Try different products to see which ones work best for you.

“ My husband couldn't eat. He didn't want to eat. All his energy was gone. I started giving him Ensure and he couldn't do that either. We went to a dietitian and figured out that the Ensure was too strong for him to keep down. So we did half-water and half-Ensure. We wanted to keep him at least well enough to continue treatment. ~ Holly (caregiver)

Many pharmacies and grocery stores sell commercial nutrition supplements. You don't need a doctor's prescription to buy them. Some provincial and private healthcare insurance plans may cover the cost under some conditions.

Talk to a registered dietitian if you think you will need to rely on commercial nutrition supplements more than food.

“ Mom never much liked those supplement drinks (such as Boost). They're thick. Nurses would tell her to water them down, but she said that they were chalky and awfully sweet. ~ Frehiwot (caregiver)

## Feeding tubes

If it becomes too difficult for you to eat or drink, and you're losing a lot of weight, your healthcare team may suggest a feeding tube to help meet your nutrition needs. A feeding tube is a thin, flexible tube that is placed directly into the stomach or intestine. Once the tube is in place, liquid nutrition supplements can be given through it. Your dietitian will determine how much of these supplements you need each day.

“ My mom had a feeding tube installed but still ate small meals (she ate lots of oatmeal and tapioca). Having the feeding tube took away the pressure to eat lots of food by mouth. The feeding tube was also helpful because we could hydrate her without Mom having to drink lots of fluids.  
~ Susan (caregiver)

## Vitamin, mineral and herbal supplements

The best way to get enough vitamins, minerals and other nutrients is to eat healthy foods. But if cancer and its treatments make it hard to eat well for long enough, you may wonder about taking a vitamin and mineral supplement every day. Talk to your doctor to see if these dietary supplements are appropriate and safe for you to use, especially if you're having chemotherapy or radiation therapy.

Some people also consider using herbal supplements or other natural health products. Be aware that natural does not always mean safe. These products may interfere with other medicines or treatments.

Always talk to your doctor about herbal supplements or natural health products before taking them.



## For caregivers

As a caregiver, you may find yourself doing the grocery shopping, organizing food supplies, cooking meals and serving food every day. Whether you have always been the cook in your home or this is a new role for you, it can be challenging.



You may find that tastes change often for a person with cancer. What tasted good one day may not taste good the next. There may be days when they only want a favourite food or nothing at all.

If you don't like to cook but have to, you might feel unhappy or even angry about it. If the food you've prepared goes uneaten, you might feel frustrated or hurt. Try your best to stay positive – things will get better.

“ My best advice is to listen to them, respect what they're telling you and let them feel that they're in control. Suggest things to eat but don't come across as a sergeant. That really doesn't work. ~ Holly (caregiver)

Sometimes the simplest things work best. Cooking a meal and eating it together, for example, can be a great way to show you care.

“ When my wife sat down with a meal, I sat down with her even if I knew I wouldn't enjoy it. It was important to us to maintain that normality. ~ Dante



## > TIPS

- Talk with each other about ways to manage eating issues. Doing this together can help you both feel more in control.
- Accept that sometimes the person you're caring for may not be able to eat much. Or they may be able to eat only a few kinds of food.
- Offer gentle support. This is much more helpful than pushing someone to eat.
- Don't blame yourself or them when they don't eat.
- Make meals that are simple and easy to prepare. (If they go uneaten, it won't bother you as much.)
- Be flexible about meal times rather than trying to keep to old routines.
- Keep food within easy reach and offer smaller meals and snacks throughout the day. Put a muffin, a piece of fruit or cheese and crackers on the bedside table. Or keep a bag of cut-up vegetables on the refrigerator shelf.
- Some people have a better appetite in the morning so try serving a larger breakfast.
- Offer a bedtime snack.
- Keep plenty of liquids available. Suggest clear liquids and thicker liquids like smoothies if they don't have an appetite.

“ My mother had a lot of problems with that. She wasn't hungry and didn't feel like cooking. I made her small frozen meals. She just had to decide what she wanted to eat. It was easier for her that way. ~ Camille (caregiver)

## Eating well after treatment

“ He's back to his normal weight now. He weighs what he did before and he's doing really well. ~ Holly (caregiver)

Once you've finished treatment and the side effects have eased off, your interest in food will probably return. It's a gradual process – changes rarely happen overnight. Try to be patient if you don't get back to your usual eating habits as quickly as you'd like. Your body needs a lot of time to recover.



“ For me it was important to get back as soon as I could to where I was – but knowing at the same time that it was going to be a slow process. I guess I've always been a glass half-full person. I don't give in! ~ Dante

“ After his treatment finished, I did small portions at first just to get his digestive system back into eating. ~ Holly (caregiver)

Eating well after treatment can help you in many ways. It can help your body regain strength and rebuild healthy cells. It can help you get to and stay at a healthy body weight. It's also important because as a cancer survivor you may be at increased risk for other health conditions like heart disease, type 2 diabetes and osteoporosis (weakening of the bones). Healthy eating can lower your risk of these and other conditions, including the risk of developing some types of cancer.

A registered dietitian can help you develop an eating plan that works for you as you continue to recover.

## > TIPS

- Follow *Canada's Food Guide* to plan your meals and make sure you get all the nutrients you need. The guide has recommendations on serving sizes and daily quantities for each food group.
- Keep trying to eat foods you used to enjoy. What doesn't taste good today might taste good tomorrow.
- Think about an atmosphere you enjoyed at meal times. If you liked candles, music or setting out your best dishes or tablecloth, try these things again.
- Make a plan to share a nice meal with close friends or family. You can even ask them to bring the food. You might like making the meal a picnic – inside or out.
- Visit your local gourmet or specialty food shop and indulge in a special treat.

### Want more information?

Our booklet *Life after Cancer Treatment* can help you develop healthy goals and a wellness plan.

### *Living with advanced cancer*

If you are living with advanced cancer, you will have different challenges in trying to eat well and maintain your body weight. Talk to your healthcare team about ways to meet your nutritional needs. Eating well will help you feel better, keep up your strength and cope with side effects like fatigue.

## Recipes

We've put together this collection of recipes because we believe that even when you feel tired or unwell you can still eat good meals without too much effort. Some recipes are simple to prepare. Others freeze well so that you can warm them up when you don't have enough energy to prepare meals.



Money concerns are common for people with cancer. If you're trying to save money on your grocery bills, choose recipes with lower-priced ingredients. Meat and fish dishes will probably cost more to make. You can try to substitute more expensive ingredients with ones that cost less. (See the tips for eating well on a budget at the beginning of this booklet.)

If you have a recipe that could help someone with cancer, send it to [recipes@cancer.ca](mailto:recipes@cancer.ca). Your recipe may be featured on our website or Facebook page or in the next edition of this booklet.

*Please note that calorie and protein nutrient values are approximate. If you have food allergies or cannot tolerate some foods, your dietitian can suggest substitutes for some ingredients – for example, using a dairy-free product instead of milk. This may affect the nutrient values shown.*

*We've kept the recipes in the cooks' own words as much as possible but revised some to make them clearer.*

## Applesauce spice muffins

Marilynn L., cancer survivor

This tasty muffin recipe is high in fibre, so it could help with constipation. The muffins are soft and easy to swallow. Instead of the dates, you could use raisins, dried cranberries or any other dried fruit. You could also use different spices, or you could add more or less of them, depending on your preferences. As an alternative, try using honey instead of brown sugar and a bit less applesauce. The muffins still turn out great and are definitely a bit moister in texture. These muffins freeze very well, and can be thawed in the microwave for about 20 seconds.

1 cup	all-purpose flour	250 mL
1 tsp	cinnamon	5 mL
1/3 cup	wheat germ	80 mL
1/4 tsp	ground cloves	1 mL
1/3 cup	brown sugar	80 mL
1/4 tsp	allspice	1 mL
1/4 tsp	baking powder	1 mL
3/4 tsp	salt	4 mL
1 tsp	baking soda	5 mL
1/4 cup	ground flax	60 mL
1/8 cup	ground chia seeds	30 mL
1/8 cup	hemp hearts	30 mL
1/4 cup	canola oil	60 mL
1	egg, beaten	1
1/3 cup	water	80 mL
1 cup + 2 tbsp	unsweetened applesauce	280 mL
12	dates, chopped	12
1/3 cup	pecans, chopped (optional)	80 mL

Mix the dry ingredients except the dates and pecans in a large bowl. Combine the liquid ingredients and add them to the dry mixture, mixing until almost blended. Stir in the dates until just blended. Add the pecans, if desired. I took the nuts out when I could no longer chew them properly.

Divide the batter among 12 large muffin cups and bake at 350°F (180°C) for 20 minutes. Remove from the pan and cool.

Makes 12 muffins

### Nutrition information

#### Per muffin

Calories	219
Fat	11 grams
Carbohydrates	27 grams
Fibre	4 grams
Protein	5 grams



## Blue cranberry smoothie

BC Blueberry Council

You can sip this simple smoothie when you have a poor appetite and need hydration. It's also a good option if you have a sore throat or find food hard to swallow. Try using an almond drink or soy beverage in this recipe instead of the water for extra calories and protein. Or replace the yogurt with any kind of milk or a soy or nut beverage for a thinner texture.

2 cups	blueberries, fresh or frozen	500 mL
1 cup	fresh cranberries, whole	250 mL
1-1/2 cups	2% to 4% vanilla yogurt	375 mL
1-1/2 cups	cranberry juice blend or cocktail	375 mL
2 cups	water	500 mL
2 tbsp	fresh mint	30 mL

Put all the ingredients into a blender and blend until smooth. Pour into chilled glasses and serve immediately.

Makes 4 servings

### Nutrition information

Per serving

Calories	215
Fat	2 grams
Carbohydrates	46 grams
Fibre	3 grams
Protein	5 grams



## Fruit smoothie

Betty Wessner, caregiver

Try this easy smoothie recipe when you have a poor appetite or if you have a dry mouth or find food hard to swallow.

1 cup	plain, unsweetened 1% or 2% yogurt (probiotic optional)	250 mL
1-2 tsp	coarsely ground flax seed	5-10 mL
1	banana, not too ripe	1
2/3 cup	frozen berries	170 mL
1/2 cup	orange juice, approximately	125 mL

Place all the ingredients in the order given except the orange juice into a blender. (I use a small drink blender.) Add enough juice to bring the mixture to the 2 cup (500 mL) mark. Process until well mixed.

Makes 2 cups

### Nutrition information

Per cup

Calories	187
Fat	3 grams
Carbohydrates	35 grams
Fibre	3 grams
Protein	8 grams



## No-bake frozen blueberry pie

BC Blueberry Council

This delicious frozen dessert is high in calories, protein and fibre. It might tempt you to eat when you have a poor appetite or if you have a sore throat or sore mouth.

### Crust

1/2 cup	almonds, whole or sliced	125 mL
1 cup	dates, pitted and chopped	250 mL
3/4 cup	unsweetened, finely shredded coconut	180 mL
3 tbsp	butter, melted	45 mL
2 tbsp	maple syrup	30 mL
1 tsp	cinnamon	5 mL
1 tsp	orange zest, finely grated	5 mL
1/8 tsp	pinch of salt	0.5 mL

### Filling

1-1/2 cups	blueberries, fresh or frozen	375 mL
1 cup	plain 11% Greek yogurt	250 mL
1/4 cup	maple syrup	60 mL
1/4 cup	cream cheese, room temperature	60 mL
3 tbsp	whipping cream	45 mL
1 tbsp	orange zest, finely grated	15 mL
1 tbsp	fresh orange juice	15 mL

### Crust

Line the bottom of a 9 in (23 cm) pie dish with a piece of parchment paper.

In a food processor, pulse the almonds until finely ground, but not a paste. Add the dates, coconut, butter, maple syrup, cinnamon, orange zest and salt, and pulse until finely ground. Press the crust to the bottom and sides of the pie dish, and set aside at room temperature.

### Filling

In a blender, purée the blueberries, yogurt, maple syrup, cream cheese, whipping cream, orange zest and orange juice to a smooth consistency. Pour the filling into the pie dish and freeze for about 2 to 3 hours. Top with fresh blueberries and a drizzle of maple syrup.

Best enjoyed within 3 to 8 hours.

Makes 6 slices

### Nutrition information

Per slice

Calories	446
Fat	27 grams
Carbohydrates	49 grams
Fibre	6 grams
Protein	6 grams





## Nut and fruit quinoa salad

Evelyn McQuaid, Canadian Cancer Society volunteer

Quinoa is a seed that can be prepared like whole grains such as rice or barley. It is easy to find these days and is a good vegetarian option. The sweet-and-sour mix in this salad could make an appetizing meal if your taste buds have changed during cancer treatment.

### Salad

1 cup	quinoa	250 mL
2 cups	water	500 mL
1/2 cup	almonds, sliced	125 mL
1/2 cup	apple, chopped	125 mL
1/2 cup	dried apricots, chopped	125 mL
1/4 cup	toasted unsalted sunflower seeds	60 mL
1/4 cup	dried cranberries	60 mL
1/4 cup	raisins	60 mL
2 tbsp	mint, finely chopped	30 mL
1/2 cup	maple vinaigrette (see below)	125 mL

### Maple vinaigrette, 1 cup (250 mL)

1/3 cup	maple syrup	80 mL
1/4 cup	cider vinegar	60 mL
1/4 cup	honey mustard	60 mL
2 tbsp	canola oil	30 mL
2 tbsp	water	30 mL

## Salad

Combine the quinoa with the water and bring to a boil. Reduce heat, cover and simmer 20 minutes until the quinoa is tender. Let stand 5 minutes and fluff with a fork. Transfer to a large bowl and add the remaining ingredients.

### Maple vinaigrette

Combine in a jar and shake well. Use half on salad. Stores in the fridge for up to 1 week.

Makes 6 servings

### Nutrition information

#### Per serving

Calories	313
Fat	11 grams
Carbohydrates	47 grams
Fibre	5 grams
Protein	8 grams



## Pasta with roasted asparagus and almond pesto

Kari Simpson, caregiver

Here's a vegetarian recipe – comfort food made with healthy oils to help maintain a healthy body weight. You could also use half whole wheat and half regular spaghetti instead of linguini. This recipe can be doubled. The sauce can be served on any type of pasta or on salmon.

3/4 tsp	kosher salt, divided	3 mL
1/2 lb	asparagus, trimmed (about 15 spears)	225 g
2 cups	grape tomatoes	500 mL
4 tbsp	extra virgin olive oil, divided	60 mL
1/2 cup	sliced almonds	125 mL
1/4 cup	fresh basil leaves	60 mL
2 tbsp	finely grated parmesan cheese	30 mL
1 lb	dried linguine	450 g
	pepper	

Position racks in the upper and lower thirds of the oven and heat the oven to 425°F (220°C). Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil over high heat.

Arrange the asparagus in a single layer on half of a large, rimmed baking sheet. Arrange the tomatoes on the other half of the sheet. Drizzle both with 1 tbsp (15 mL) of olive oil and season with 1/4 tsp (1 mL) of salt. Toss to coat. Roast on the top rack until the tomatoes have collapsed and the asparagus is bright green – about 20 minutes.

While the vegetables roast, put the almonds on another rimmed baking sheet and toast on the bottom rack, stirring occasionally for 10 to 12 minutes. Reserve 1 tsp (5 mL) of the almonds for garnish, and put the remaining almonds in a food processor or blender.

Remove the tips from the asparagus and set aside. Put the rest of the asparagus (the stems), the basil, cheese, 1/2 tsp (2 mL) of salt and the remaining 3 tbsp (45 mL) of olive oil into the blender. Pulse until a coarse paste forms. Season to taste with salt and pepper, and transfer to a large serving bowl.

Boil and drain the pasta and reserve 1/2 cup (125 mL) of the cooking water. Add the pasta to the pesto and toss to coat. If necessary, add some of the reserved cooking water to loosen the pesto to a saucy consistency.

Garnish with the tomatoes, asparagus tips and almonds.

**Makes 6 servings**

### Nutrition information

#### Per serving

Calories	436
Fat	15 grams
Carbohydrates	62 grams
Fibre	5 grams
Protein	14 grams



## Peppercorn corn bisque

Dylan Kiernan and David Lee, students from the culinary arts program, Vancouver Community College

This flavourful, gluten-free soup can be a good choice if the foods you usually eat taste different now. The cream could be changed to skim or 1% milk to lower the fat and calories.

2 tbsp	butter	30 mL
1	large yellow onion, sliced	1
7	garlic cloves, roasted	7
1 cup	yellow pepper, sliced	130 g
1/8 tsp	salt	0.5 mL
4-5 quarts	prawn or fish stock	4-5 L
5-7	cobs of corn, with corn removed (or 3-4 cups of frozen corn)	5-7
1/2-1 cup	cooked brown rice	80-130 g
1/2-1 cup	table cream	125-250 mL
	peppercorns	
	optional garnishes:	
	1/4 cob of corn, grilled	
	basil oil and scallions	

Heat the butter in a large pot over medium heat. Stir in the onion, and cook until soft and caramelized. Stir in the garlic and yellow pepper, and season with a pinch of salt. Cook on low heat for 5 minutes or so to develop flavour. Pour in the stock and bring to a simmer. Husk and cut corn off the cob or use frozen corn. Stir the corn into the broth, and simmer about 10 minutes. Reduce heat to a low simmer and cook for 25 minutes.

Turn off the heat and prepare the blender or food processor for puréeing. Add the rice and blend the liquid in batches. Pass the liquid through a fine sieve or fine strainer into a pot as it comes out of the blender. After all the liquid is blended, bring it back to a low simmer. Add the cream in a steady stream while stirring the bisque until fully combined. (If you add milk instead of cream, use less of this liquid to keep the mixture thick.) Add salt and peppercorns to taste, making sure to add a few extra peppercorns to enhance the flavour.

Serve in a warm bowl with garnishes, if desired.

Makes 4 large servings

### Nutrition information

Per serving

Calories	506
Fat	20 grams
Carbohydrates	55 grams
Fibre	5 grams
Protein	31 grams



## Red pepper and bacon quiche

Kin's Farm Market

Here's a high-calorie and high-protein meal that could be prepared a little bit ahead of time and warmed up when you don't have a lot of energy to cook.

### Pie shell

1-1/2 cups	flour	375 mL
6 tbsp	butter, room temperature	90 mL
2 tbsp	water	30 mL
1	egg white, lightly beaten	1

### Filling

4	eggs	4
1 cup	1% milk	250 mL
4	strips bacon, cut in pieces, pan fried	4
1	onion, caramelized or pan fried	1
1	red bell pepper, sliced, pan fried	1
2 cups	shredded cheddar cheese	500 mL
	salt and pepper	

### Pie shell

Mix the flour and butter together with your hands until the dough comes together into a ball. Add the water and extra butter or flour as necessary to develop the right consistency. Spread the dough on a 9 in (23 cm) round tart pan. Lightly beat the egg white and spread on top of the dough with a brush. Remove the excess dough and place the quiche shell in the fridge for half an hour. While the shell hardens in the fridge, prepare the filling.

### Filling

Preheat the oven to 350°F (180°C), and beat the eggs and milk with salt and pepper until fluffy. Place the bacon, onion and bell pepper on the bottom of the quiche shell, cover it with the shredded cheddar cheese, and then cover it with the milk and egg mixture.

Cook the quiche in the oven for about 45 minutes to 1 hour, or until you stick a knife in it and it comes out clean. Serve with a side green salad.

Makes 6 slices

### Nutrition info

Per slice

Calories	495
Fat	32 grams
Carbohydrates	29 grams
Fibre	2 grams
Protein	22 grams



## Root vegetable soup

Hélène Sauv , caregiver

This hearty soup with meatballs is easy to eat and very filling if you're looking for foods high in calories and protein. It can be frozen, then simply reheated when you don't have a lot of energy to cook.

2 tbsp	butter	30 mL
1	medium onion, chopped	1
1 tsp	salt, divided	5 mL
2	medium turnips, peeled and chopped	2
2	sweet potatoes, peeled and chopped	2
4	medium parsnips, peeled and chopped	4
5 cups	low-sodium chicken broth	1.25 L
1 cup	water	250 mL
1/2 lb	ground pork or lean ground beef	225 g
1 tbsp	minced chives, plus more for garnish	15 mL
1 tbsp	minced flat-leaf parsley	15 mL
3 tbsp	finely grated asiago, parmesan or pecorino cheese	45 mL
1/4 tsp	freshly ground black pepper	1 mL

Melt the butter in a medium pot over medium-high heat. Add the onion and 1/2 tsp (2 mL) of salt. Cook, stirring, until soft, about 2 minutes. Add the turnips, sweet potatoes, parsnips, broth and water. Bring to a boil, then reduce the heat to medium-low and simmer until the vegetables are tender, 10 to 15 minutes.

Meanwhile, to make the meatballs, combine the pork or beef, chives, parsley, cheese, 1/2 tsp (2 mL) of salt and the pepper in a small bowl. Mix gently to combine. Form into 36 balls, about 1 tsp (5 mL) each, and set aside.

Process the soup in a blender until smooth (in batches if necessary). Return to the pot and keep warm over low heat.

In a wide, shallow pan, bring at least 2 in (5 cm) of water to a boil. Add meatballs and cook until they float to the surface and are cooked through (test one to be sure), about 4 minutes. Transfer to a warm plate with a slotted spoon.

Divide the soup among 6 bowls. Top each bowl with 6 meatballs and sprinkle with chives and pepper. Serve hot.

Makes 6 servings

### Nutrition information

#### Per serving

Calories	262
Fat	11 grams
Carbohydrates	25 grams
Fibre	4 grams
Protein	17 grams





## Tomato soup

Marjorie Matheson, cancer survivor

This vegetarian soup is puréed and easy to swallow. Fresh tomatoes may help if you have a metallic taste in your mouth. This recipe can easily be doubled, and it freezes well.

1 tbsp	olive oil	15 mL
1/2 cup	carrots, finely diced	125 mL
1/2 cup	celery, finely diced	125 mL
1-2	cloves garlic, chopped	1-2
1	large onion, finely diced	1
12	plum tomatoes, cut in half	12
3 cups	vegetable (or chicken) stock	750 mL
1	bay leaf	1
1/2 tsp	dried oregano	2 mL
1/2 tsp	dried basil	2 mL

Heat the oil in a large pot. Add the carrots, celery, garlic and onion, and sauté for a few minutes. Add the tomatoes, and cook for 10 minutes. Add the stock, bay leaf, oregano and basil. Bring to a boil, turn heat down and simmer for 20 to 30 minutes until the vegetables are soft. Remove the bay leaf and purée in a blender or with a hand blender.

Makes 4 servings

### Nutrition information

Per serving

Calories	156
Fat	6 grams
Carbohydrates	20 grams
Fibre	4 grams
Protein	7 grams



## Resources

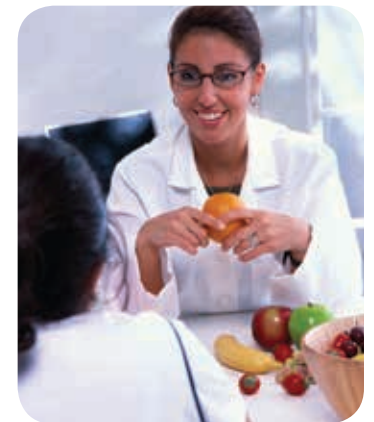
### Finding a registered dietitian near you

A registered dietitian is a healthcare professional who has a university degree in food and nutrition and practical training within a hospital or health region. Most cancer centres have a registered dietitian on staff who can provide one-on-one counselling. They can answer your questions on diet and nutrition throughout your treatment and recovery.

If your treatment centre doesn't have a dietitian on staff, try these options to find someone near you:

- Ask your healthcare team.
- Ask your family doctor.
- Contact Dietitians of Canada at 416-596-0857 or [www.dietitians.ca](http://www.dietitians.ca).

If you want to confirm that a dietitian is registered, contact the college of dietitians in your area. Contact information for all dietetic regulatory agencies in Canada can be found at [www.dieteticregulation.ca](http://www.dieteticregulation.ca).



## Canadian Cancer Society

The Canadian Cancer Society fights cancer by doing everything we can to prevent cancer, save lives and support people living with cancer.

All of our services are free and confidential.

### Getting the information you need

Our trained information specialists take the time you need to answer your questions over the telephone and by email. If you need information in a language other than English, interpreters are available. We have the information you need about:



- nutrition basics
- side effects of treatment and ways to manage them
- healthy living after treatment

Through our Community Services Locator, we can help you find services and programs in your community that are offered by the Canadian Cancer Society and other organizations.

We offer resources on a wide range of cancer-related topics in print and online. You may find these publications useful:

*Radiation Therapy: A guide for people with cancer*

*Chemotherapy and Other Drug Therapies: A guide for people with cancer*

*Living with Cancer: A guide for people with cancer and their caregivers*

Note: These titles may change when new versions of the booklets are published.

## Talking to someone who's been there

If you would like to talk to another survivor who's had a similar cancer experience, we can help. Let us connect you with a volunteer who can listen, provide hope, offer encouragement and share ideas for coping – all from the unique perspective of someone who's “been there.”

If you'd like to connect with someone online, join our online community, [CancerConnection.ca](http://CancerConnection.ca). There are discussions, blogs and groups that may interest you, and you'll find caring, supportive people there.

### To contact the Canadian Cancer Society:

- Call us toll-free Monday to Friday at **1-888-939-3333** (TTY 1-866-786-3934). If you need help in another language, interpreters are available.
- Email us at [info@cis.cancer.ca](mailto:info@cis.cancer.ca).
- Visit our website at [cancer.ca](http://cancer.ca).
- Contact your local Canadian Cancer Society office.



## Suggested websites

### Health Canada

[www.hc-sc.gc.ca](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca)

Search for > Canada's Food Guide

### Dietitians of Canada

[www.dietitians.ca](http://www.dietitians.ca)

### ELLICSR Kitchen

[www.ELLICSRkitchen.ca](http://www.ELLICSRkitchen.ca)

The ELLICSR Kitchen is a cooking and nutrition program at the Princess Margaret Cancer Centre. Find recipes, cooking tips and nutrition education to help you eat well before, during and after cancer treatment.

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## We'd like to hear from you

Email us at [publicationsfeedback@cancer.ca](mailto:publicationsfeedback@cancer.ca) if you have comments or suggestions to help us make this booklet more useful for you and other readers.

## What we do

The Canadian Cancer Society fights cancer by:

- doing everything we can to prevent cancer
- funding research to outsmart cancer
- empowering, informing and supporting Canadians living with cancer
- advocating for public policies to improve the health of Canadians
- rallying Canadians to get involved in the fight against cancer

Contact us for up-to-date information about cancer and our services or to make a donation.



Canadian Cancer Society  
Société canadienne  
du cancer

1 888 939-3333 | [cancer.ca](http://cancer.ca)  
TTY 1 866 786-3934

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