

## Eating When Unwell

When you are unwell your body needs a lot more energy than normal, even though you might not feel like eating. In times of illness, you may lose your appetite, food might not taste the same or you might feel constantly full. However, it is important to remember that food plays a very important role in your recovery, and in fact your body needs MORE food when you are unwell. Think of food as a fuel for your body or as a medicine as part of your treatment.

### Loss of Appetite

**To increase your appetite, you can try the following:**

- Eat something every couple of hours during the day, think small and frequent eating.
- Eat by the clock.
- Serve food on a small plate, as a large full plate may be off putting.
- Gentle physical activity can stimulate appetite- try taking a short, gentle walk around the block (if able).
- Enjoy meals with family and friends.

### Nausea

**To combat nausea, you can try the following:**

- Do not skip meals- an empty stomach can make nausea worse.
- If the smell of food cooking causes nausea, try and stay away from the kitchen- have other family members/ roommates cook for you if possible, or order in.
- Use mouth rinses and washes or try sucking on sugar free hard-boiled lollies or peppermints to reduce bad mouth tastes.



- Try not to lie down or lean your chair back during, and for at least 30-60 minutes, after eating.

### Snack ideas for managing nausea:

- Try cold or room temperature foods as these do not taste or smell as strong e.g. sandwiches, salads, custard, mousse, yoghurts, tinned fruit or jelly.
- Snack on dry foods e.g. biscuits, noodles, cereal, toast or crackers.
- Eat salty foods e.g. clear soup and potato crisps may help.
- Drink cold clear fluids between meals e.g. cordial, lemonade, dry ginger ale or fruit juice.
- Try ginger containing foods e.g. ginger beer, ale, tea or candied ginger.
- Try not to eat fatty, rich, spicy or very sweet foods if you find they make your nausea worse.
- You may find softer foods which require less chewing easier to eat.

## Admissions

During hospital admissions, it is important to eat well and maintain your weight. The dietitian will visit you during your admission to help with achieving optimal nutrition intake during your inpatient stay.

**Here are some tips to manage your weight during an admission:**

|                          |   |
|--------------------------|---|
| <b>Breakfast</b>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Choose a high protein choice every day, such as eggs.</li><li>• Add cream to porridge and coffee.</li></ul>   |
| <b>Main Meal</b>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Eat the meat/meat alternatives and/or dessert before your veggies (if your appetite is poor).</li><li>• Add butter or margarine to the veggies.</li><li>• Add cream to your soup.</li><li>• Ask for a double serve of the protein part of your meal.</li><li>• Choose a sandwich as well as your hot meal or salad.</li></ul> |
| <b>Dessert</b>           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Order two or three dessert options.</li><li>• Order a side of ice-cream, cream, or yoghurt.</li></ul>   |
| <b>Snacks</b>            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ask for your favourite snacks.</li><li>• Ask visitors to bring favourite snacks.</li><li>• Keep your snacks within easy reach.</li><li>• Don't rely on your appetite - try to eat something every two to three hours.</li></ul>   |
| <b>Nutritious Drinks</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• When your appetite is poor, it may be easier to drink than eat-nutritious drinks include:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ plain or flavoured full cream milk</li><li>○ milo</li><li>○ milkshakes</li><li>○ nutritional supplements e.g. Sustagen or Scandishake</li></ul></li></ul>                                    |
| <b>Meal Times</b>        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sitting out of bed (if possible) during mealtimes can make it feel more normal.</li><li>• Moving around and getting out of bed can help your appetite.</li><li>• Encourage visitors at mealtimes to make meals more enjoyable.</li></ul>  |

Many thanks to Katelyn McCafferty and Katherine Adamek, Dietitians, Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital, for input into this factsheet.

Last reviewed: July 2023.