

# Poor Appetite

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Loss of appetite (the desire to eat) is a common side effect of cancer and its treatment. Causes of poor appetite include:

- Sadness, depression, grief, or anxiety
- Illnesses or medical conditions, such as fever or pneumonia
- Cancer and cancer treatments, such as chemotherapy and radiation
- Certain medications

It is important to try to overcome a poor appetite since not eating can lead to weight loss, weakness, and fatigue.

## **A Word of Caution**

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Some symptoms and side effects related to a poor appetite are particularly serious. Call your doctor if:

- You lose 5 pounds or more.
- You can't eat for more than a day.
- You have pain with eating.
- You have infrequent, strong-smelling, or dark-colored urine.
- You vomit for more than 24 hours.
- You have pain that is not controlled.

## Ways to Improve a Poor Appetite

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- Discuss the medications you take with your doctor. For example, some medications for constipation, nausea, or pain can cause poor appetite. It might be possible to improve your appetite by changing the type of medication you take, the dose, or the medication schedule.
- Ask your doctor if a medication to increase your appetite could be right for you.
- Eat small amounts throughout the day instead of eating big meals.
  - For example, eat a small meal or snack every 2 or 3 hours or take a few bites every 30 to 60 minutes.
  - For between-meal snacks, try half a sandwich, a bowl of yogurt, cereal and milk, or a granola bar.
- Choose drinks that are nourishing, high in calories, and high in protein.
- Make every bite count by choosing higher calorie foods. Do not fill up on low-calorie beverages like diet soda or coffee.
- Move around when possible. Walking and other gentle forms of exercise help encourage a better appetite.
- Make your surroundings cheerful. The distraction of a pretty table, flowers, or soft music may help you eat better.
- Keep a list of favorite recipes and meals on hand for friends and family members who help with cooking or shopping.
- Keep your pantry and freezer well stocked with foods that make quick and easy meals and snacks, such as single-serving entrées and ready-to-eat packaged foods.
- Use the clock, TV shows, or commercial breaks to remind you to take a sip, eat a bite, or have a snack.

## Sample 1-Day Menu

**Note:** Sip on 6 to 8 cups of fluid throughout the day.

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### Breakfast

- 1/2 cup orange juice
  - 1 slice toast with 1 tablespoon peanut butter
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### Midmorning snack

- Granola bar and 1/2 cup milk
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### Lunch

- 1/2 sandwich made with lunchmeat, a slice of cheese, lettuce, and 1 tablespoon mayonnaise
  - Small dish of mandarin oranges or other soft fruit
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### Afternoon snack

- 2 sugar cookies and 1/2 cup apple juice
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### Dinner

- 2 ounces lean beef
  - 1/2 cup mashed potatoes
  - 1 dinner roll
  - 1 teaspoon margarine
  - 1/2 cup green beans
  - 1/2 cup peaches
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### Evening Snack

- 1 cup yogurt
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