

How to have a nourishing diet

Name:

Date:

Your Dietitian:

Contact Number:

Who is this leaflet for?

Feeling unwell, or having certain medical treatments may mean your appetite is smaller than usual. Appetite can also decrease as you get older. Some people find that even if their appetite is normal, the condition they have means they need more nourishment than usual to maintain their weight. In all these cases, it is very important to meet your nutritional needs for good health and to prevent weight loss. This booklet gives advice on what to eat and drink if you are concerned about having a poor appetite, weight loss, or are experiencing difficulties with eating.

Why is good nutrition important?

Good nutrition means a variety of foods taken regularly and providing sufficient energy, protein, fat, carbohydrate, vitamins, minerals, fluid and fibre to meet your needs.

Good nutrition is essential, especially during periods of illness, as it means you will be stronger, better able to fight infection and cope with treatment.

Where do I start?

Foods high in calories and protein can help you to increase your energy intake, without adding extra bulk to your diet. Having 3 small meals with regular snacks and nourishing fluids in between can also help you to meet your dietary needs, even if your appetite is smaller than usual.

How to enrich your food

Milk and milk products

- Aim to use at least 600 mls (1 pint) of full fat milk daily (Calcium enriched sweetened milk alternatives such as Soya, Oat or Nut milks can also be used).
- Milk can be fortified by adding skimmed milk powder. Use 4 tablespoons per pint of milk, or 3-4 teaspoons per serving added to yoghurts, porridge, bought milk puddings, sauces and soups. Milk powder can be bought from any supermarket e.g Marvel or supermarket own brand. Use fortified milk whenever you would use ordinary milk.
- Milky drinks taken between meals make a nourishing snack e.g. Ovaltine, Horlicks, drinking chocolate, milky coffee or milkshakes.
- Include milk desserts like custards, creamy yoghurt or fromage frais after meals or as a snack between meals.
- Condensed milk or cream is delicious used as a dessert topping or stirred into puddings, custards and sweet sauces.
- Evaporated milk can be used to replace milk in hot and cold drinks.
- Yoghurt or cream added to soups or casseroles gives additional flavour and energy.

- Yoghurt, fruit juice, fruit, cream and honey or sugar can be added to liquids to make a refreshing drink.
- Choose thick and creamy/luxury/Greek yoghurt and avoid diet or low fat varieties.
- Use milk based sauces wherever possible; examples include cheese sauce on cauliflower, eggs or fish, and custard on fruit.

Cheese

- Grated cheese added to mashed potato, soups, sauces or melted on vegetables/burgers/fish/beans adds flavour, energy and protein to dishes.
- Cheese and biscuits make a good snack between meals.
- Always use full fat varieties e.g. Cheddar, Cheshire or full fat cheese spread.

Protein sources

- Aim for three portions of protein each day.
- Choose from meat, fish, poultry, eggs, cheese, nuts, seeds, pulses (beans and lentils), tofu, Quorn®, soya or pea protein. It is not necessary to remove fat or skin from meat. These protein sources can be used in salads or as sandwich fillings.
- Add minced meat/flaked fish/corned beef/beans/lentils to soups and stews.
- Try cheese/white/parsley sauce with fish.
- Omelettes, fried, scrambled or poached eggs can be a nourishing lighter meal. Boiled mashed egg can be added to rice or mashed potato.

Fats, sauces and dressings

- Avoid low fat spreads.
- Use fats e.g. butter or oil as often and as generously as possible in cooking.
- Spread butter or margarine thickly on bread, toast and scones.
- Margarine, butter or olive oil can be added to hot vegetables and potatoes before serving.

- Instead of grilling or baking, try roasting or frying foods in oil or butter.
- Use salad cream, mayonnaise and dressings to add flavour and energy to salads, vegetables, jacket potatoes, sandwiches, pasta, chips or even with meat and fish.
- Fry rice, chips or roasted potatoes with oil to increase the energy content.

Sugar

- Use ordinary sugar instead of artificial sweeteners. Stir plenty into drinks and desserts.
- Use on breakfast cereals and porridge or choose sugar/honey coated cereals.
- Drink ordinary squash and fizzy drinks instead of sugar free/diet varieties. Caution: fizzy drinks may fill you up and reduce your appetite further.
- Add jam, golden syrup, lemon curd, chocolate spread, honey or treacle to milk puddings, yoghurts and porridge, or spread thickly on toast.

(See Frequently asked Questions section if you have diabetes).

Fruit and vegetables

- This group of foods is not high in energy or protein, but provide necessary vitamins and minerals. Aim to eat a variety of different coloured fruit and vegetables to provide a range of nutrients. Fresh, frozen and tinned varieties are all nutritious. They also provide fibre to help prevent constipation.
- Add extra energy to these foods to increase the nourishment they provide.
- Try milky sauces e.g. cheese/white sauce on vegetables.
- Stir fry vegetables or add butter/oil after cooking.
- Dried fruit are higher in energy and can be eaten as a snack or added to cereal, salads, cakes and desserts.
- Buy tinned fruit in syrup rather than natural juice.

- Add extra cream, chocolate sauce or custard to fruit for dessert or a snack.
- Use dressings on salads to increase their energy content.
- Drink fruit smoothies made with ice cream, yoghurt or cream.

Soup

- Make packet or condensed soup with milk instead of water. Use milk when making home-made soup.
- Add cheese, cream, fromage frais or yoghurt and stir in well, serve with bread.
- Choose thick and creamy or 'cream of' soups rather than thin soups e.g. consommé.
- Try adding beans, pasta, rice or dumplings to soups.

Quick and nourishing snack and meal ideas

Keep a store of ready prepared convenience foods and nutritious snack meals for when you are feeling less well.

Sandwiches

Fill with:

- Cold meat/bacon.
- Tinned fish.
- Cheese/cheese spread.
- Peanut butter.
- Patè.
- Hummus.
- Tuna/chicken/egg/prawn mayonnaise.
- Smoked/flaked salmon with cream cheese.

Try using different types of bread and rolls for variety e.g. bagels, pitta bread, breakfast muffins, and add sauces, mayonnaise and relish for extra flavour and energy.

Toast

Topped with:

- Sardines/pilchards in oil/sauce.
- Baked beans with cheese.
- Cheese.
- Ravioli.
- Spaghetti with cheese.
- Eggs.
- Welsh Rarebit.
- Croque Monsieur.
- Jam, marmalade, honey, peanut butter or chocolate spread.

Snacks

- Crackers or biscuits with butter and cheese.
- Fruit cake/malt loaf with butter.
- Toasted crumpets/teacakes with butter and jam/marmalade or cheese.
- Soup with added cheese/cream and bread.
- Breakfast cereal with milk/yoghurt and sugar/honey.
- Ice cream/sorbet/frozen yoghurt.
- Readymade desserts e.g. trifle, crème caramel, mousse.
- Cereal bars.
- Small sandwiches or rolls.
- Crisps or chips with dips e.g. hummus, taramasalata, soured cream, cream cheese or guacamole.
- Packets of nuts try yoghurt or chocolate coated varieties, dried fruit or seeds.

Pastries, chocolate and crisps

- These provide extra energy when taken with meals. Take care that they don't spoil your appetite for more nourishing foods.
- Try sweet pastries such as cakes, biscuits, custard tarts, Danish pastries, doughnuts, éclairs, iced buns and cupcakes for between-meal snacks.

- Savoury items to try include mini pies, scotch eggs, savoury slices, sausage rolls, spring rolls and pasties.
- Chocolate, sweets and crisps are ideal snacks if you are on the go.

Simple meals

- Shepherd's Pie or Fisherman's pie with added cheese in the topping.
- Corned Beef Hash with carrots.
- Lasagne with salad, topped with a dressing and served with oven chips or garlic bread.
- Sausages and baked beans with cheesy mashed potato.
- Egg and bacon on toast with butter.
- Boil-in-the-bag fish with rice or potatoes and frozen vegetables.
- Tinned stew and instant potato with frozen vegetables.
- Tinned macaroni cheese with tomatoes.
- Savoury rice with cold meat/fish and mixed vegetables.
- Omelette with cheese/meat served with fried mushrooms.
- Oven ready fish/fish fingers and oven chips and peas.
- Pizza.
- Egg fried rice with cold meat/fish or tofu.
- Creamy/coconut based curry with rice.
- Gammon and egg with chips and peas.
- Chicken or mini kiev's with potato wedges and peas.
- Risotto with cheese and cream.
- Jacket potato with baked beans and cheese.

If cooking is tiring, use convenience foods. Supermarkets have a good range of frozen, chilled, tinned or packet ready meals. There are companies who will deliver frozen meals to your door. Ask your dietitian for further details. Milk delivery services may also deliver other items on request e.g. potatoes/juice/yoghurt.

Easy puddings

- Tinned rice pudding/custard.
- Bread and butter pudding or sponge pudding with cream.
- Pancakes with syrup/honey, sugar and lemon or chocolate spread.
- Thick and creamy yoghurt, Greek yoghurt or high protein yoghurt.
- Trifle.
- Tinned fruit in syrup with ice-cream/sorbet.
- Mousse/fruit fool.
- Pre-prepared chocolate/flavoured puddings e.g. Mars, Aero, Caramel (examples of brand names available).
- Crème caramel.
- Blancmange/junket/instant whip.
- Milk jelly.
- Sago/semolina/tapioca with jam.
- Custard tart.
- Cheese cake and cream.
- Éclairs/profiteroles.
- Fruit pie or crumble with ice cream/custard.

Nourishing drinks

Add hot milk, ideally fortified with milk powder, to:

- Malted drinks e.g Horlicks, Ovaltine.
- Cocoa or drinking chocolate.
- Coffee.
- Instant soup.

Hot milky drinks are comforting and warming. Have a flask by your side so that you can have a hot drink frequently.

Add cold milk to:

- Milkshake flavourings e.g Crusha, Nesquik.
- Mashed fruit with cream / yogurt / ice cream to make milkshakes.

Other ideas include:

- Fruit or vegetable juice.
- Soft/fizzy drinks (not diet or sugar free varieties) with added cordial and ice cream to make an ice cream soda.
- Fruit smoothies made with ice cream, cream or yoghurt.
- Readymade milk drinks e.g. Mars, Galaxy, Bounty or supermarket own brands.
- Readymade yoghurt drinks e.g. Yop, Yazoo, Friji.

Food supplements

There are commercial products available at chemists which can be taken between meals to supplement your diet. Occasionally, these can be taken as a meal replacement if you are unable to eat your normal meals.

- Complan Food Ltd COMPLAN®
- Nestlé Meretine Energis®

These are all available in a variety of sweet and savoury flavours. Try a variety to find one you enjoy. Complan is also available on prescription.

Ice-cream, yoghurt or liquidised fruit can be added to the sweet varieties to provide alternative flavours. The natural or unflavoured varieties may be added to puddings, sauces, drinks and soups.

Other products are available only on prescription – your Dietitian will advise you if these are necessary.

Important: If your appetite is poor and you continue to eat very little and/or you are losing weight, please consult your Dietitian for further advice. Contact details are on the front of this booklet.

Sample meal plans

Breakfast

Fruit Juice

Porridge with cream and honey

Cup of tea/coffee

Mid morning

Cup of milky coffee/latte

Biscuits

Lunch

Egg Mayonnaise sandwich
with a packet of crisps

Fruit and ice-cream

Cup of tea/coffee

Mid afternoon

Cup of tea/coffee

Carrot cake

Evening meal

Cheese omelette with mushrooms

Salad with dressing

Thick and creamy yoghurt

Evening Snack

Hot Chocolate

Nuts and raisins

Breakfast

Cup of tea/coffee

Fried bacon

Breakfast muffin with butter

Mid morning

Milkshake

Cereal bar

Lunch

Cream of chicken soup
with bread and cheese

Milk jelly

Cup of tea/coffee

Mid afternoon

Custard tart

Cup of coffee

Evening meal

Fish in white sauce

Mashed potato + Broccoli

Banana custard

Cup of tea/coffee

Evening snack

Crumpets with butter and
jam/peanut butter

Malted drink

Shopping list ideas

Savoury snacks

- Patè
- Sausage roll
- Pasty
- Scotch egg
- Pork pie
- Spring rolls
- Onion bhaji
- Cheese straws
- Cheese biscuits
- Nuts
- Dried fruit
- Garlic bread
- Crisps
- Bombay mix
- Prawn crackers
- Cheesy/creamy dips
- Chicken drumsticks
- Chicken satay sticks
- Taramasalata
- Guacamole
- Tapenade

Sandwich fillings

- Corned beef
- Ham
- Tinned fish – salmon, tuna, sardines, pilchards, crab
- Egg/tuna/chicken/prawn mayonnaise
- Cream cheese
- Peanut butter
- Bacon
- Sausage including vegetarian varieties
- Cheese
- Falafel
- Hummus

For quick and easy meals

- Eggs
- Baked beans
- Canned fish
- Cheese
- Baking potatoes
- Canned creamy soup
- Sausages
- Bacon
- Gammon steak
- Lamb cutlets
- Pork chop
- Pasta with a cheese sauce

Ready made meals

- Toad in the hole
- Steak and kidney pie
- Chicken pie
- Cheese and vegetable pie
- Roast dinner
- Shepherd's pie
- Fish pie
- Chicken kiev
- Curry
- Battered/breaded fish or fishcakes
- Quiches
- Macaroni cheese
- Lasagne
- Pizza
- Meat casserole with dumplings
- Fish and chips or bought takeaways

Puddings

- Rice pudding
- Junket
- Crème brulee/caramel
- Sticky toffee/chocolate pudding
- Jam/chocolate sponge
- Fruit pies/crumble
- Custard
- Cheesecake
- Sundae
- Mousse/instant whip
- Greek yoghurt
- Thick and creamy yoghurts

PASTRIES

- Eclairs
- Doughnuts
- Fruit or sponge cake
- Chocolate brownies
- Caramel slices
- Turnovers/Jam tarts
- Danish pastries
- Tea cake/scone
- Crumpets/muffins
- Croissant
- Brioche

Biscuits

- Flapjack
- Chocolate digestives
- Oat biscuits
- Shortbread/cookies
- Bourbons
- Custard Creams
- Jammy Dodgers
- Cereal bars

Sweets

- Chocolate and chocolate bars
- Fudge
- Toffee
- Chocolate/yoghurt coated dried fruit or nuts
- Boiled sweets

Other

- Whole milk
- Skimmed milk powder
- Evaporated/condensed milk
- Butter/margarine
- Olive or vegetable oil
- Cream
- Tinned/packet/pot custard or custard powder
- Malted drinks
- Hot chocolate
- Milkshakes
- Fruit juice
- Tinned fruit in syrup
- Over the counter supplement drinks

Freezer cabinet

- Frozen vegetables
- Frozen chips
- Yorkshire puddings
- Meat and fish or vegetarian alternatives
- Frozen ready meals
- Pizza
- Ice cream
- Frozen desserts
- Garlic Bread
- Naan bread

Frequently asked questions

Q: I've always wanted to lose some weight. Surely it's better to be thinner?

A: Losing weight during illness reduces your ability to fight infection, delays healing, reduces mobility and can lead to feeling low in mood. Preventing weight loss is a very important part of your treatment, and improves your likelihood of recovery.

Q: This leaflet recommends lots of fatty and sugary foods, I thought these were unhealthy! Should I really be eating them?

A: It is important for people with a small appetite to eat a diet which provides all the nutrients you need (not only vitamins and minerals, but energy and protein too). If you have a small appetite, you are unlikely to meet your energy and protein needs if you follow a low fat, high fibre diet. Instead, you need to eat a diet rich in fat and sugar which is higher in energy to try and prevent weight loss.

Q: I've got diabetes, is this advice still appropriate for me?

A: The best way to prevent weight loss if you are diabetic is to add extra fat to your diet, rather than sugar. This will ensure you receive extra nourishment without causing poor blood sugar control. Much of the advice in this booklet will be appropriate for you. However, take care with the sweet products recommended, as these may cause your blood sugar to rise. Talk to your dietitian for personal advice.

Q: I don't like milk, do I need to start drinking it?

A: If you don't like the taste of milk, try adding milkshake powder, pureed fruit, or syrup to change the taste. Or you could add milk to soups and sauces for a savoury flavour. You could also increase your intake of cheese, yoghurt, cream and custards instead to boost your diet. Dairy free alternatives are available but many of these products are lower in energy than their dairy counterparts. Talk to your dietitian if this applies to you.

Q: I'm vegetarian, is that ok?

A: If you don't eat meat or fish, you will still be able to boost the calories in your diet. Include vegetarian sources of protein at every meal – try eggs, pulses, nuts, soya products and dairy products (milk, cheese, yoghurt, cream). Remember that fruit and vegetables are lower in calories than other foods. Try adding extra sauces or cheese onto vegetables, and serving fruit with sugar and cream, yoghurt, custard, or ice-cream.

Q: I don't like all the foods that you've suggested, do I have to eat them anyway?

A: When you are eating smaller amounts than usual, it is important that you enjoy the foods that you eat. This booklet gives a variety of suggestions to account for different tastes. If you dislike a particular food or drink suggested, try to choose another food that you prefer from the list.

Q: Are there any foods that I need to avoid?

A: Unless you have been told specifically by your dietitian or doctor that you should avoid a particular food or drink, there is no need for you to restrict your diet. You can eat whatever you like.

A guide to symptom control

Useful tips to help with some symptoms you may be having because of your illness or medication.

Loss of appetite

- Eat little and often – have nourishing snacks or drinks between meals.
- Drinking after meals rather than before may help if you feel full easily. Try milky drinks, soups and fruit juice which have more nourishment than tea, coffee, squash and water.
- Make food look attractive to tempt your appetite and keep portions on your plate to small, realistic quantities.
- Make sure you are relaxed before meals and comfortable when you are eating. Take your time and chew your food well.
- If you are tired, avoid foods that are bulky and need a lot of chewing.
- Try to think of foods that you will enjoy eating – your favourite foods!
- Prepare food in advance when you feel well enough to cook. When your appetite is good, make the most of it. It is a good idea to keep snacks handy.
- Try a small glass of sherry or brandy half an hour before a meal to increase your appetite (check with your doctor first).
- If you are unable to manage a full meal, have a supplemented soup and pudding or a nourishing drink e.g. Meritene, Complan or prescribed supplement drink instead.
- Choose full fat foods wherever possible – these may be called 'luxury' or 'thick and creamy' rather than 'light', 'diet' or 'low fat'
- Big plates of food can be off-putting. A smaller plate can seem more manageable, and you can always have another helping if you still feel hungry.
- Some exercise, activity or fresh air can help improve appetite.

Nausea and vomiting

- Try not to get anxious about eating – aim to take as much nourishment as possible at whatever time of day suits you best.
- If cooking smells put you off your food, avoid cooking. Ask family and friends to prepare meals if possible. Keep your kitchen well ventilated to reduce cooking smells Cold food and drinks have fewer smells and may be more suitable.
- Take small, frequent meals and try to build up the amount you can manage.
- Dry foods e.g. toast, crackers and plain biscuits may be easier to take.
- Cool, fizzy drinks sipped between meals may relieve nausea – avoid taking with meals as they may fill you up.
- Greasy, fatty foods and fried foods are all likely to worsen nausea.
- If you are able, try to go for a walk in the fresh air before your meal and eat in a well ventilated room.
- Tight clothing and lying down after meals will cause discomfort.
- Your doctor may be able to prescribe anti-nausea medication.

Diarrhoea

- Drink plenty of fluids to replace water loss.
- It may be helpful to cut down on highly spiced, greasy or fried foods.
- Take small frequent meals throughout the day.
- When the diarrhoea has stopped, slowly start eating the foods you have been avoiding.

You may be given additional advice regarding reducing fibre intake. Discuss with your Dietitian.

Constipation

- Eating higher fibre foods can help. Try wholemeal bread and biscuits, higher fibre cereals e.g. branflakes or Weetabix. Fruit, vegetables and pulses are also excellent sources of fibre.
- If you feel full quickly when eating higher fibre foods instead try drinking fruit or vegetable juice between meals and having soft tinned or stewed fruits as a pudding.
- Fibre helps constipation by absorbing fluid – make sure you drink at least 6-8 cups of fluid per day.

Your doctor may be able to prescribe medication to help if changing your diet makes no difference.

Written information cannot replace personalised recommendations. For further advice please seek a dietetic referral from your consultant or GP.

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