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Patient information

Eating well with a small appetite

Nutrition and Dietetics Department



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1. Introduction

This leaflet provides information for people with a small appetite. It gives advice and ideas on how to eat well to build yourself up during times when you may not feel like eating as much as normal

Your body normally has stores of some nutrients. When you eat less food these stores are used up so you begin to lose weight. It is important to keep your body well nourished to help stop this from happening. While you are not able to eat as much as usual, it is particularly important to try to make sure that you are still getting enough calories and protein.

People with diabetes

When appetite is very poor it is often acceptable to have some foods and drinks which are higher in sugar than usually allowed. Talk to your Dietitian if you have any further questions.

Eating well helps you to:

- Minimise weight loss
- Maintain your strength
- Tolerate your treatment better and recover more quickly
- Fight infections
- Withstand the stress of illness

Notes

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Name:

Date:

Dietitian:

Contact Number:

Hospital Site:

9. Summary

- A poor appetite makes it difficult to maintain or gain weight.
- If you have a poor appetite then it is important to choose foods and drinks that are as nutritious as possible.
- Aim to eat plenty of calories and protein.
- Choose full fat versions of meals and avoid diet versions or lower calorie varieties such as clear soups.
- Fruit and vegetables are good sources of vitamins, minerals and fibre, but don't fill up on them as they do not contain much energy or protein.
- Adding extra fattening foods such as cream, butter, mayonnaise and cheese to your meals.
- Eat little and often – aiming for 5-6 smaller meals per day.
- Eat when your appetite is best.
- Choose nourishing drinks.
- Try fortifying full fat milk and aim to drink a pint per day.
- Supplements can be useful – discuss with your GP or dietitian if you are unsure whether you need them.
- Contact your GP if you have concerns such as continued weight loss, nausea/vomiting or diarrhoea, difficulty taking solids or worsening appetite.

2. Helpful hints

Poor appetite?

- Appetite can come and go, so make the most of times when you feel like eating and eat more when you are hungriest.
- Have a little of what you really fancy to tempt your appetite.
- Try to get out into the fresh air and, if appropriate, take some light exercise like a short walk to stimulate your appetite.
- Keep a stock of your favourite foods and snacks in the cupboard.

Feeling full too quickly?

- Large portions can be overwhelming. It is often easier to eat small meals and snacks more frequently. Think 'little and often' and try to have something to eat every 2 – 3 hours.
- Drinks before meals can fill you up so have them after meals instead.
- Don't fill up on lots of fruit and vegetables as they are low in calories and protein.
- If you have soups, choose cream or milk based ones rather than low calorie, clear varieties or powdered soup made up with water.

Don't feel like cooking?

- Frozen or chilled meals, either home-made or ready-prepared, can be very useful. To ensure safety, follow cooking instructions carefully.
- Takeaway foods can be useful, especially if a home delivery service is available for extra convenience.
- Meal on wheels services may operate in your area: ask your local authority what is available.
- There are also companies such as Wiltshire Farm Foods or Oakhouse Foods that can deliver frozen meals to your home.

3. Nourishing drinks

It is important that your body has enough fluid to allow it to work properly. Aim to have 6-8 cups of fluids every day and include nourishing drinks that contain energy (calories) and protein.

Some examples of nourishing drinks are:

- A glass of 'fortified' milk (see below) served warm or cold according to your taste
- Full fat milkshakes or full fat yoghurt drinks
- Hot milky drinks like coffee, hot chocolate or malted milk that can be made with fortified milk for extra nourishment
- Full sugar fizzy drinks blended with ice cream (or soya ice cream for a non dairy version)
- Smoothies made with full fat yoghurt blended with soft fruit
- If you are intolerant to lactose, try full fat lactofree milk
- For non dairy nourishing drinks use soya milk rather than rice milk as soya milk is higher in protein

Fortified milk:

Milk can be 'fortified', or enriched, by adding 3-4 heaped tablespoons of dried milk powder to one pint of full cream (blue top) milk. Add a little of the full cream milk to the milk powder, mix it into a paste and then slowly add the rest of the pint of milk. Use this fortified milk instead of ordinary milk in cereals, porridge, sauces, packet soups, instant desserts, tea, coffee or just to drink. Try to consume 1 pint each day.

8. Additional information

- Try to have at least 2 protein rich foods every day (meat, fish, egg, cheese, milk, pulses or vegetarian alternatives like Quorn™, tofu or soya)
- Eat some starchy foods such as bread, cereals, potatoes, chapattis, rice or pasta with each of your main meals.
- Have some fruit and vegetables every day but don't fill up on them – they can be pureed or juiced if you prefer.
- You may like to try some supplement drinks such as Complan or Meritene Energis drinks that you can buy from many pharmacies or supermarkets.
- You may need a multivitamin and mineral supplement if you are only managing small amounts of foods. You may not need to take additional vitamins and minerals if you are having supplement drinks (for example, Complan or a prescribed supplement such as Fresubin 2kcal or Fortisip Compact) as these may already provide all the vitamins and minerals you require. If you are unsure whether you need extra vitamins and minerals, ask your GP or dietitian for advice.

Recipes for nourishing drinks/puddings

- *Milk Shake:*

Mix 200ml (a third of a pint) of fortified milk with 2 scoops of vanilla ice cream and 2 heaped teaspoons of fruit flavoured milkshake powder, syrup or drinking chocolate.

- *Cream Shake:*

Mix 200ml of fortified milk with a 2 tablespoons of double cream and chocolate or fruit flavoured syrup or powder.

- *Fruit Smoothie:*

Blend 200ml of fortified milk with a handful of soft fruit (berries, bananas or apricots, for example) and a tub (150g) of ice cream or full fat yoghurt. Add 2 tablespoons of honey for extra calories.

- *Juice Shake:*

Mix together 50ml (2 fl oz) orange juice, 50ml (2 fl oz) pineapple juice and 100ml (4 fl oz) of full sugar lemonade.

- *Fortified Hot Chocolate, Horlicks or coffee:*

Gently warm 200ml (a third of a pint) of fortified milk and mix with 2-3 teaspoons of cocoa powder, Horlicks or coffee granules and 50g double cream – add sugar to taste

- *Honey Yoghurt:*

Mix a tub (150g) of Greek/full fat yoghurt with 2 tablespoons of honey.

- *Milk jelly*

Warm a pint of fortified milk, combine it with flavoured jelly crystals and 50g double cream and allow it to cool in the fridge to set.

- *Custard:*

Make up powdered custard with fortified milk and add 50g double cream.

4. Meal ideas

Breakfast:

- Breakfast cereals served with fortified (see page 4) or full fat milk and added sugar, dried fruit or nuts as preferred.
- Toast or croissant with plenty of margarine or butter and jam, marmalade, peanut butter, chocolate spread, scrambled eggs, cheese or avocado.
- Toasted currant tea cake or croissant with butter, margarine and jam or chocolate/nut spread.
- Full fat yoghurt with honey and dried fruit or nuts.
- A buttered roll filled with bacon, sausage, egg, cheese or banana.
- A cooked breakfast such as sausage, egg and beans with toast and butter.

Easy meals:

- Toast with plenty of butter and toppings such as cheese, baked beans, tinned spaghetti or peanut butter.
- Toast with an egg dish such as omelette or fried/scrambled eggs with extra butter, cheese or ham.
- Baked beans on toast with plenty of butter and grated cheese
- Sandwiches filled with meat, cheese, egg or fish (use plenty of butter and full fat mayonnaise or salad cream).
- Baked cheese dishes such as cauliflower cheese, macaroni cheese or cheesy tuna and pasta bake.
- Ready made meat pies, sausage rolls or pastries
- Tinned macaroni cheese or ravioli on buttered toast.
- Packet savoury rice with added tinned or fresh meat/fish, cheese or pulses. Add extra oil, butter or margarine as well.
- Jacket potato with plenty of butter topped with cheese, tuna mayonnaise, baked beans, sandwich fillers, egg mayonnaise or tinned sardines.
- Pies, burgers, pizzas.
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5. Snack ideas

If you are only managing small meals, it is important to try to have some regular snacks as well.

Savoury snacks:

- Baked beans, cheese, eggs or tinned fish on toast with plenty of butter or margarine.
- Cold cooked meats, sausages, sausage rolls, quiches, Scotch egg, pizza, samosas, bhajis.
- Sandwiches – with nourishing fillings as before.
- Buttered crackers with cheese or pate.
- Crisps, mini pittas, crackers or corn chips and creamy dips.
- Mug of full cream soup with slice of buttered toast.

Sweet snacks:

- Full fat yoghurt or fromage frais with extra nuts and/or honey.
- Cereal with fortified milk and sugar or honey.
- Nuts and raisins with a banana.
- Home made or ready prepared milky puddings or custards.
- Tinned sponge puddings with custard or full fat yoghurt.
- Packet dessert mixes (such as instant whips, mousses, crème caramel) made up with fortified milk.
- Chocolate bars, cereal bars or other sweets.
- Indian style sweets.
- Toast, scones, croissants or pancakes with plenty of butter or margarine and jam or chocolate spread.
- Cakes and biscuits.
- Tinned or stewed fruit in syrup with custard evaporated milk, cream or ice cream.

6. Soups

Soups are often low in protein and energy (calories). However, they are also easy to eat and tempting when your appetite is poor. Make them more nourishing using the following tips:

- Avoid low calorie, slimming soups and clear, watery soups.
- If you are choosing tinned soups then choose the ‘cream of...’ varieties.
- Make powdered packet soups with fortified milk.
- Add extra cream, milk powder, full fat yoghurt, olive oil, meat, beans, peas, lentils or pasta to soups.
- Serve soups with extra, high energy garnishes like grated cheese or croutons or a generous drizzle of olive oil.

7. Food fortification

You may not be able to manage larger quantities of foods but you can make your foods more nourishing by adding extras. Try the following ideas:

- Add extra butter, margarine, oil or cream to mashed potatoes, pasta, rice, curries or vegetables.
- Spread butter or margarine very generously when you are using it on bread, toast, crackers, crumpets, chapattis, etc.
- Add grated cheese to potatoes, pasta, soups, sauces.
- Milk powder can be added to scrambled eggs, omelettes, mashed potatoes, milky puddings, sauces and soups to add more protein.
- Add cream, evaporated milk or milk powder to milky puddings, custards, sauces, desserts and soups.
- Add sugar, jam, honey, syrup, dried fruit, chopped nuts and nut spreads to cereals, yoghurts, puddings and ice cream.
- Use mayonnaise, salad cream and salad dressings generously.