

Eating well during treatment

Eating well has never been more important than it is now. When you go through treatment for breast cancer, good nutrition will help:

- Keep you strong
- Your body rebuild tissue that has been damaged by treatment
- Your body deal with the side effects of treatment
- Your body fight off infection

Be sure to eat a variety of foods: breads and grains, fruits, vegetables and dairy. You may even need to eat more high-protein foods such as chicken, fish or beans during treatment. High-protein foods and plenty of calories will give your body the energy you need to keep up with your treatment.

Just as every person responds a little differently to cancer treatment, people also respond differently to food during treatment. Ask your doctor to refer you to a registered dietitian (RD) or nutritionist who can help you choose foods for your unique needs if you are having trouble eating.



A word about... weight changes

Some people who go through treatment for breast cancer have weight changes. Weight gain may be due to fluid retention and/or increased appetite caused by some cancer medications or the onset of menopause. Weight loss may be a result of poor appetite due to the side effects of treatment or cancer itself. It is important to try to maintain your normal body weight with a healthy diet and exercise. Tell your doctor if you notice a weight gain or loss of five pounds or more in one month. He/she will look into what is causing this change and give you advice.

A word about... nutrition supplements

Most women who go through treatment for breast cancer do not need to take a nutrition supplement. You can usually get what you need by making a few changes to what you eat. If you are having trouble eating, check with your doctor or RD. They can give you tips on adding more protein or calories to your diet. Talk to your doctor before adding supplements to your diet. Some may interfere with your treatment.

Common concerns

Treatment may cause side effects that can directly impact your diet. If you have any of the side effects listed below, be sure to tell your doctor or RD. The tips listed under each side effect may also help.

Side effects related to your diet

I don't feel like eating.

- Eat smaller meals more often during the day.
- Eat whatever sounds good to you, even if it is not the healthiest choice.

Foods just don't taste or smell the same.

- Try foods that are tart, like lemon pudding, or try stronger seasonings, like oregano and rosemary.
- Avoid strong smelling meat, such as beef. Try chicken, turkey or eggs.

My mouth and throat are very sore.

- Eat softer foods such as mashed potatoes, macaroni and cheese, milkshakes, pudding or applesauce.
- Eat foods at room temperature. Foods that are too hot can make your sore mouth feel worse.
- Talk to your doctor about medications that can help.

My mouth is really dry.

- Suck on hard candy or eat popsicles or fruit juice bars. They help produce more saliva.
- Add gravy, broth and sauces to your foods to make them more moist.

Diarrhea has become a problem for me.

- Make sure you get plenty of fluid throughout the day. Water, broth and juice are good choices.
- Eat foods low in fiber such as pasta, cottage cheese, yogurt, white bread and smooth peanut butter. Doctors may also tell you to eat the BRAT diet (bananas, rice, applesauce and toast).
- Cut down on dairy.
- Talk to your doctor about medications that can help.

Eat whatever sounds good to you, even if it is not the healthiest choice.



What will help me with constipation?

- Make sure you get plenty of fluid every day.
- Eat high-fiber foods such as whole grain breads, fresh fruits and vegetables, brown rice and beans.
- Take a stool softener.

I'm always so nauseated and feel like I have to vomit.

- Ask your doctor about drugs called antiemetics [an-tee-eh-MET-iks]. They can help control nausea and vomiting.
- Eat more bland foods such as toast, crackers, oatmeal and clear liquids.
- Avoid greasy and spicy foods.

Resources

Susan G. Komen®
1-877 GO KOMEN (1-877-465-6636)
www.komen.org

National Cancer Institute Eating Hints: Before, During and After Cancer Treatments
www.cancer.gov/cancerinfo/eatinghints

Our Message Boards offer online forums to share your thoughts or feelings about subjects related to breast cancer. Our Healthful Living forum within the Message Boards offers women ideas for nutritious living and ways to stay physically active while dealing with breast cancer.

Related fact sheets in this series:

- Chemotherapy and Side Effects
- Integrative and Complementary Therapies
- Radiation Therapy and Side Effects

The above list of resources is only a suggested resource and is not a complete listing of breast cancer materials or information. The information contained herein is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or to replace the services of a medical professional. Komen does not endorse, recommend or make any warranties or representations regarding the accuracy, completeness, timeliness, quality or non-infringement of any of the materials, products or information provided by the organizations referenced herein.