

MACMILLAN
CANCER SUPPORT

EATING PROBLEMS AND CANCER



About this booklet

Many people have eating problems during and after cancer treatment. This can be related to the cancer itself or the side effects of different treatments. This booklet talks about some common eating problems and why they might happen. It also suggests some practical ways to manage them.

This booklet is part of a series of booklets on diet and cancer. The other booklets in the series are **Recipes for people affected by cancer**, **The building-up diet** and **Healthy eating and cancer**. Check with your cancer doctor, nurse or dietitian that this is the right booklet for you, and whether you need any additional information.

We have included quotes from people who have had eating problems. Some of these are from our Online Community (macmillan.org.uk/community). The rest are from people who have chosen to share their story with us. To share your experience, visit macmillan.org.uk/shareyourstory

How to use this booklet

You don't have to read the booklet from start to finish. You can use the contents list on page 3 to help you. It is fine to skip parts of the booklet. You can always come back to them when you feel ready.

At the end of this booklet there are some useful organisations and websites (see pages 49 to 53).

For more information

If you have more questions or would like to talk to someone, call the Macmillan Support Line free on **0808 808 00 00**, Monday to Friday, 9am to 8pm, or visit **macmillan.org.uk**

If you would prefer to speak to us in another language, interpreters are available. Please tell us, in English, the language you want to use.

If you are deaf or hard of hearing, call us using NGT (Text Relay) on **18001 0808 808 00 00**, or use the NGT Lite app.

We have some information in different languages and formats, including audio, eBooks, easy read, Braille, large print and translations. To order these visit **macmillan.org.uk/otherformats** or call **0808 808 00 00**.

Your data and the cancer registry

When you are diagnosed with cancer in the UK, some information about you and your health is collected in a cancer registry. This is used to plan and improve health and care services. Your hospital will usually give this information to the registry automatically. There are strict rules to make sure the information is kept safely and securely. It will only be used for your direct care or for health and social care planning and research.

Talk to your doctor or nurse if you have any questions. If you do not want your information included in the registry, you can contact the cancer registry in your country. You can find more information at **macmillan.org.uk/cancerregistry**

Contents

How cancer can affect eating	4
Mouth and throat problems	10
If you are too tired to cook or eat	20
Bowel changes that affect your diet	22
Feeling sick, heartburn and indigestion	26
Changes to your appetite	32
Your feelings about eating problems	34
Caring for someone with eating problems or weight loss	37
Helpful resources about eating problems and cancer	42
About our information	44
Other ways we can help you	46
Other useful organisations	49

How cancer can affect eating

People with cancer have different dietary needs. Some people feel well and able to eat normally. For others, weight loss or a poor appetite were symptoms that led to their diagnosis. If you had eating problems before you were diagnosed, you may need some support from your doctor or dietitian to improve your diet before you start treatment.

Some eating problems may be related to the cancer itself. Depending on where the cancer is in your body, it can cause you to feel sick (nausea), be sick (vomit), or it can cause pain or poor digestion. The cancer may also change the way your body uses the food you eat, so that you don't get all the nutrients you need.

'The dietitian I saw twice a week made sure that I was getting enough nutrients to get me back on the road to recovery.'

John

Dietitians

Qualified dietitians are experts in assessing the food needs of people who are ill. They can review your diet and they will take into account any specialist dietary requirements you have. They can advise you on which foods are best for you, and whether any food supplements would be helpful.

If you have problems with your diet, you can ask your doctor at the hospital to refer you to a dietitian. In some hospitals, you can refer yourself. Contact the hospital's dietetic department for more information. If you are not in hospital, your GP or district nurse can refer you to a community dietitian, who will visit you at home.

Cancer treatments

Some cancer treatments can cause eating problems. Some problems are temporary and improve when you finish treatment. Others may last longer. Your doctor, specialist nurse or dietitian will support you and advise you on what might help.

Surgery

Some types of surgery can slow down your digestion. If you have surgery to your mouth, throat, stomach or bowel, you may need to adjust to changes in your eating patterns.

Radiotherapy

Radiotherapy to your head, neck or chest area can cause:

- taste changes
- swallowing difficulties
- a dry mouth
- a sore mouth and throat.

Radiotherapy to the tummy (abdomen) or pelvic area (the area between the hips) can make you feel sick or be sick. It can also cause diarrhoea.

Chemotherapy

Common side effects of some chemotherapy treatments include:

- loss of appetite
- taste changes
- constipation
- diarrhoea
- feeling sick or being sick
- a sore mouth.



'I experienced taste changes quite early on during my chemo. It put me off eating. But I still made sure that I ate healthy and nutritious food to keep my strength up.'

Priti

Targeted (biological) therapy

This can affect your appetite or your ability to eat.

Problems might include:

- taste changes
- a dry or sore mouth
- feeling sick.

Risk of infection (reduced immunity)

Cancer or treatments for cancer may increase your risk of infection. Some treatments can temporarily lower the number of white blood cells in your body that help fight infection. Having a lower number of white blood cells than normal is called neutropenia.

Most people having cancer treatment will not need to change their diet. If you are having high-dose chemotherapy, you may be advised to avoid foods that might contain harmful bacteria. You may also need to be extra careful with food hygiene. This is called a 'clean diet'. It can help reduce your risk of getting an infection. Your specialist nurse will discuss this with you.

Foods to avoid if your immunity is low

If your immunity is very low, you might need to avoid certain foods. Your doctor, nurse or dietitian will be able to tell you whether you need to avoid any of these foods:

- cheeses made from unpasteurised milk (and other foods or drinks made from unpasteurised milk)
- mould-ripened and blue-veined cheeses
- liver pâté
- yoghurt or other products that contain probiotics
- fresh salads
- raw meats and seafood
- runny eggs.

We have more information about reduced immunity and avoiding infection in our booklet **Healthy eating and cancer**. To order our information, call us on **0808 808 00 00**.

Special diets

Some people with cancer may have specific eating problems, for example:

- people with diabetes
- people who have a colostomy or ileostomy
- people who have had all or part of their stomach or bowel removed
- people who have had radiotherapy to their mouth or jaw.

If you have any of the above, you may need to follow a special diet. Your doctor, specialist nurse or dietitian can give you advice.

Mouth and throat problems

Some cancer treatments can damage the cells that line your mouth or throat. Soreness and ulceration of the lining of the mouth or throat is called mucositis. It can be very painful. Mucositis can be caused by chemotherapy, targeted therapies, or radiotherapy to the head and neck. Any damage is usually temporary and most side effects go when treatment ends.

A common mouth infection called thrush (candidiasis) can cause the lining of your tongue and mouth to become red and swollen. It looks like white spots on your mouth and tongue. Thrush is treated with anti-fungal tablets. These tablets are also sometimes used to prevent thrush.

Your specialist nurse or doctor will talk to you about mouth care during treatment and they may examine your mouth. Tell them if your mouth is sore or if any soreness is getting worse.

We have information about mouth care during treatment that you might find helpful. You can order our booklet **Side effects of cancer treatment** for free. Call us on **0808 808 00 00** or visit **be.macmillan.org.uk**



Tips to keep your mouth healthy

The following tips may be helpful for keeping your mouth healthy during and after cancer treatment:

Drinks

- Drink plenty of fluids, especially water. If you find that fresh fruit juices sting your mouth, try less acidic juices instead, such as peach or pear nectar, or blackcurrant or rosehip syrup. You could try freezing them in an ice-cube tray – sucking on the ice cubes can soothe your mouth.
- Try milk or milk-based drinks, such as malted drinks, milkshakes and hot chocolate.
- Cold foods and drinks may be more soothing. Try adding crushed ice to drinks and eating ice-cream or soft, milk jellies.
- Very hot or very cold drinks may irritate a sore mouth. Some people find drinks that are lukewarm or at room temperature more soothing.
- Try drinking through a straw.

Food

- Avoid salty or spicy food.
- Avoid rough-textured food like toast or raw vegetables.
- Keep your food moist by adding sauces and gravies.
- Tell your doctor if you have a sore mouth. They can prescribe soothing or antiseptic lotions or sprays for you.
- You may find that taking painkillers before meals can help you swallow more easily.

Mouth care

- Mouthwashes can be very soothing, but many of the ones available in chemists or shops may be too strong for you. Salt-water mouthwashes are just as effective at reducing soreness if it is not too severe. You can make this by adding a teaspoon of salt to cold or warm water. Rinse this around your mouth and then rinse with cold or warm water. Or your doctor can prescribe an anaesthetic gel or mouthwash instead.
- Many hospitals have their own mouth care guidelines for people having chemotherapy or radiotherapy, which include the best toothpaste to use. Your doctor or specialist nurse will be able to advise you.
- You may be advised to see your dentist before you start treatment. They may recommend using high-fluoride or non-foaming toothpaste to help reduce any soreness.
- Use a children's soft toothbrush to clean your teeth gently. Avoid using toothpicks when cleaning your teeth. If you want to use dental floss, check with your doctor or specialist nurse first. If you have a low platelet count, flossing can make your gums bleed.
- If you wear dentures, soak them in a denture-cleaning solution overnight. Leave them out for as long as you can during the day to prevent them rubbing against your gums.
- If you are having radiotherapy to the jaw area, you may be advised to keep your dentures in as much as possible during the day to help maintain the shape of your gums. But if your mouth is very sore, it may be more comfortable to leave your dentures out.

Tips if you have a dry mouth

Radiotherapy to the head and neck area and some chemotherapy drugs can damage the saliva glands. This may lead to a dry mouth (xerostomia). The following tips may be helpful for coping with a dry mouth during and after cancer treatment:

- If your tongue is 'coated', it may make your food taste unpleasant and might put you off eating. You can clean your tongue with a bicarbonate of soda solution. Use one teaspoon of bicarbonate of soda (available from your chemist) dissolved in a pint (570ml) of warm water. Clean your tongue with a soft toothbrush, foam-stick or gauze, dipped in the solution. Check with your clinical nurse specialist for more advice.
- Frequent drinks, even if you just take a few sips at a time, can help keep your mouth moist. You may find fizzy drinks the most refreshing, including fizzy water. Keep a glass of water by your bed and carry water with you when you go out.
- Try sucking ice cubes or lollies. You can make lollies by freezing fresh fruit juice in ice-cube trays or in lolly containers with sticks.
- Keep your food moist by adding sauces and gravies.
- Avoid chocolate and pastry, as they can stick to the roof of your mouth.

- Chewing gum can sometimes stimulate the production of saliva.
- Tell your doctor about your dry mouth. They can prescribe mouthwashes, lozenges, artificial saliva sprays or protective gels if needed.
- It is important not to use any balm on your lips during radiotherapy treatment. Speak to your clinical nurse specialist or radiotherapy team about when you can use lip balm after treatment.
- Try using an atomiser spray with cool water to keep your mouth moist.

We can send you more information about coping with a dry mouth. Visit [be.macmillan.org.uk](https://www.be.macmillan.org.uk) or call us on **0808 808 00 00**.

'I have a dry mouth and some foods have become very difficult to eat. The worst foods are bread and rice. Pasta is sort of okay, as long as there is lots of sauce.'

James

Tips for coping with taste changes

You may find that food tastes different during treatment, although this is usually temporary. You may no longer enjoy certain foods or find that all foods taste the same. Food may taste very sweet or salty, or you may have a metallic taste in your mouth. Occasionally people lose their sense of taste, but this usually comes back.

- Eat foods that you enjoy and ignore those that do not appeal to you. But try them again after a few weeks, as your sense of taste may have changed.
- Use seasonings, spices and herbs such as pepper, cumin or rosemary to flavour your cooking. But if your mouth is sore, you may find that some spices and seasonings make it worse.
- Try marinating meat in fruit juices or wine, or cook it in strong sauces such as curry or sweet and sour. But be careful if your mouth is sore, as these sauces may feel painful to eat.
- Cold meats may taste better served with pickle or chutney.
- Sharp-tasting foods such as fresh fruit, fruit juices and sour or boiled sweets can be refreshing and leave a pleasant taste in your mouth. Be careful if your mouth is sore as these may be painful to eat.
- If you no longer like tea or coffee, try lemon tea or a cold, fizzy drink such as lemonade.
- Some people find that cold foods taste better than hot foods. If your sense of taste or smell has changed, it can sometimes help to serve food at room temperature.
- Serve fish, chicken, red meat and egg dishes with sauces.
- If you notice a metallic taste in your mouth, try using plastic cutlery.

Tips for coping with difficulties chewing or swallowing

Chemotherapy and radiotherapy treatments for head or neck cancer can affect the cells in the lining of the throat. This can make it painful to chew or swallow. An infection in your mouth or throat, such as thrush (see page 10), can also make chewing and swallowing uncomfortable.

Let your doctor or dietitian know if you are having any difficulties. If you find that drinks make you cough, you should tell your doctor or specialist nurse as soon as possible. A speech and language therapist (SLT) can advise you about swallowing problems.





'Since starting chemotherapy, I often have difficulty chewing my way through what would normally be quite easily digested meals.'

Trevor

Below are some tips for coping with difficulties chewing or swallowing:

- You may find that taking painkillers before meals can help you chew and swallow more easily. Your doctor or nurse can suggest what might be best for you to take.
- Keep eating your favourite foods when possible. You could try cooking them in sauces and gravies.
- Finely chop meat and vegetables, then casserole or stew them.
- Cut the crusts off bread for softer sandwiches.
- If you have a blender, you could liquidise cooked foods.
- Some frozen-meal home-delivery companies have a soft-food range on their menu.
- There are several food supplements that you may find helpful, for example Complan[®] drinks. You can buy these from your chemist or supermarket. Your doctor may give you a prescription for some of them. Your GP or dietitian can explain which food supplements might be best for you.

Our information on the building-up diet has examples of different food supplements. Call **0808 808 00 00** to order your free copy of our booklet **The building-up diet**.

If you are too tired to cook or eat

Feeling very tired (fatigued) is a common side effect of cancer treatment. It is often worse towards the end of a course of radiotherapy or chemotherapy and for some weeks after treatment has finished. You may find you are struggling to cook your meals and you are too tired to eat.

Tips to help you cope with tiredness

There are different ways you can make things easier if you are feeling too tired to cook or eat:

- Use convenience foods such as frozen meals, tinned foods and ready meals. Remember to defrost frozen foods thoroughly and cook all foods properly to avoid any risk of food poisoning. Read and follow cooking instructions carefully.
- Try to plan ahead. If you have a freezer, prepare food when you are feeling more energetic and freeze it to use when you are feeling tired. You could stock up on convenience foods or use a local meal-delivery company.

- Family, friends or neighbours may want to help in some way. You could ask if they could get some shopping or cook for you.
- If you really don't want to eat, try a nourishing drink. You can make a smoothie by blending bananas, peaches, strawberries or other soft fruit (fresh or frozen) with fortified milk, fruit juice, ice-cream or yoghurt in a liquidiser or blender.
- Your doctor, nurse or dietitian can prescribe or recommend supplement drinks for you.
- If you feel you need more help at home with your cooking or eating, tell your GP or contact the dietitian at your hospital. They may be able to arrange for you to have meals delivered (meals on wheels) or for someone to help you prepare your food.
- It may be easier to eat smaller meals more often throughout the day rather than a few bigger meals.

You might find our booklet **Coping with fatigue** helpful. Call us on **0808 808 00 00** to order a copy.

'Eating small, regular portions can help with tiredness. Starchy and high-fibre foods are best for providing slow-release energy.'

Teresa, Cancer Information Nurse

Bowel changes that affect your diet

Tips to help with constipation

Constipation means that you are not able to open your bowels (poo) as regularly as you normally do. It can become difficult or painful for you to poo. Some chemotherapy drugs, anti-sickness drugs and painkillers can cause constipation.

Below are some tips that can help with constipation:

- Make sure you eat plenty of fibre (roughage) each day. Good sources of fibre include: whole-wheat breakfast cereals like Weetabix®, Shredded Wheat® or muesli; wholemeal bread and flour; brown rice; wholemeal pasta; fresh fruit and vegetables.
- Make sure you drink plenty of fluids – both hot and cold drinks will help. Aim to drink at least 2 litres (3.5 pints) a day. This is particularly important if you increase the amount of fibre in your diet, as eating fibre without drinking enough fluids can make constipation worse.
- You could try a natural remedy for constipation. These include prune juice, prunes, fig syrup and dried apricots.

- Gentle exercise, such as walking, will help keep your bowels moving.
- If you are constipated because of the medicines you are taking, it may be possible to change the dose you take. You may need to take laxatives (medicines that help you poo) as well. Your doctor can give you more advice.

If you have cancer of the bowel, or you think your cancer treatment is causing constipation, ask your doctor or specialist nurse for advice.

Tips to help with diarrhoea

Diarrhoea usually means that you need to poo more in a day than you normally do, and the stools you pass are looser than normal.

Chemotherapy, radiotherapy, targeted therapies and surgery can all cause diarrhoea. The treatments can affect the healthy cells that line the digestive tract, which causes diarrhoea. Sometimes an infection or other medications, such as antibiotics, can also cause diarrhoea.

Diarrhoea can be a temporary, mild side effect. But for some people, it can be severe and they will need to see a doctor to help manage it. Tell your doctor if you have diarrhoea or if it is getting worse. They can find out the cause and prescribe anti-diarrhoea medicines.

If your diarrhoea is caused by radiotherapy or chemotherapy, changing your diet alone is unlikely to help. It is important to take the anti-diarrhoea medicines prescribed by your doctor. If you have diarrhoea after surgery for bowel cancer, talk to your doctor or specialist nurse before changing your diet.

Sometimes diarrhoea can be severe. It is important to contact the hospital if this happens. If you have more than 4 to 6 episodes of diarrhoea a day, contact the hospital on the telephone numbers you have been given and speak to a doctor or nurse.

Below are some tips that can help with diarrhoea:

- Drink plenty of liquid (at least 2 litres or 3.5 pints a day) to replace the fluid lost with the diarrhoea.
- Avoid drinking alcohol and coffee.
- Eat small, frequent meals made from light foods, for example white fish, poultry, well-cooked eggs, white bread, pasta or rice.
- Eat your meals slowly.
- Eat less fibre (for example cereals, raw fruits and vegetables) until the diarrhoea improves.
- Avoid greasy, fatty foods such as chips and beef burgers, and spicy foods like chilli peppers.

Antibiotics can kill off the healthy bacteria normally found in the bowel. This can cause diarrhoea. The bacteria found in live yoghurt or yoghurt drinks may replace the healthy bacteria, so may help ease diarrhoea caused by antibiotics. But you should avoid live yoghurt while you are having chemotherapy or if your immunity is low.

Tips to help with wind

The amount of wind we produce depends on the way healthy bacteria and digestive enzymes in our bowel combine with the foods we eat.

Pelvic radiotherapy (to the lower tummy area) can cause wind. This is because the pelvic floor muscles can become weaker. Some types of bowel surgery may cause problems with wind. Constipation and some types of medicines can also cause wind. If you find wind difficult to cope with, talk to your doctor or specialist nurse. If passing wind becomes painful, tell your doctor.

Below are some tips that can help with wind:

- Eat and drink slowly. Take small mouthfuls and chew your food well.
- Avoid food that you think gives you wind. Beans and pulses, pickles and fizzy drinks commonly cause problems.
- A popular natural remedy is to drink two teaspoons of peppermint water dissolved in a small cup of hot water. You can sweeten this with sugar. Or you could try peppermint tea.
- You could try taking charcoal tablets, which you can buy from the chemist.
- Gentle exercise, especially walking, can improve wind.
- Try to ensure you have a poo regularly – wind can be a sign of constipation.
- Your GP can prescribe peppermint oil capsules that may help.

Feeling sick, heartburn and indigestion

Tips to cope with feeling sick (nausea)

Some cancer treatments can make you feel sick (nausea). These include some chemotherapy, hormonal therapy and targeted therapy drugs, and radiotherapy to the brain, stomach, bowel or close to the liver. Some painkillers and antibiotics, and physical problems like constipation or liver damage, can also cause nausea.

There are very effective treatments to help prevent and control sickness. Your cancer specialist or GP can prescribe anti-sickness (anti-emetic) drugs for you. Tell them if your anti-sickness drugs are not helping, as there are different types you can take.



If feeling sick is putting you off your food, these tips may help:

- Try eating dry food, such as toast or crackers, first thing in the morning before you get up.
- If the smell of cooking makes you feel sick, eat cold meals or food from the freezer that only needs heating up. Remember to follow the cooking instructions to make sure it is properly cooked.
- If possible, let someone else do the cooking.
- Avoid greasy, fatty or fried foods.
- Try sitting by an open window while you eat, so there is plenty of fresh air in the room.
- Sit in an upright position at a table when eating, and stay sitting for a short time after the meal.
- When you feel sick, start by eating light foods, such as thin soups. Gradually introduce small portions of foods you feel like eating. You can slowly build up to a more varied diet.
- Food or drinks containing ginger can help reduce feelings of sickness. You could try crystallised ginger, ginger tea or ginger biscuits.
- Some people find peppermint tea reduces nausea. You could add a teaspoon of honey if you prefer a sweeter taste.
- Sipping a fizzy drink is a popular remedy to stop feeling sick. Try fizzy mineral water, ginger ale, lemonade or soda water, and sip it slowly through a straw.

- Try having drinks between meals rather than with your food.
- You could try wearing sea bands (available from chemists) around your wrists. They use acupuncture to help relieve nausea.
- Try to make sure you have a poo regularly, as constipation can make you feel sick.

We have more detailed information about coping with nausea and vomiting in our booklets **Side effects of cancer treatment** and **Managing the symptoms of cancer**. You can order these by calling **0808 808 00 00** or visiting **be.macmillan.org.uk**

Tips for coping with heartburn and indigestion

Heartburn is a burning sensation behind the breastbone. It can be very painful. It is caused when acid from the stomach irritates the lining of the gullet (oesophagus).

Indigestion is discomfort in the upper part of the tummy (abdomen), happening especially after meals. It can happen when stomach acid irritates the lining of the stomach or small bowel. Some drugs (such as steroids or anti-inflammatory painkillers) and some cancer treatments (such as chemotherapy) can also irritate the stomach lining. You may get indigestion if you have a small stomach capacity, do not eat or drink much, or if you do not move around very much.

Here are some tips to help relieve heartburn and indigestion:

- Talk to your doctor. They can try to find out the cause and prescribe medicines to help reduce or relieve it for you.
- There are medicines that can help relieve irritation by neutralising the stomach acid. Your GP or cancer specialist can suggest what might be best for you to try.
- Make a note of any foods that cause discomfort so you can avoid them.
- Large meals, chocolate, alcohol, fatty and spicy foods, fizzy drinks, chewing gum, hard-boiled sweets, mint, aniseed and dill are all known to cause problems. You may want to limit or avoid these.
- When symptoms have settled, you can try re-introducing what you have been avoiding in small quantities, one at a time. This is so you can start to have a healthy, balanced diet.
- Wear loose clothing around your waist.
- Limit activity for at least 45 to 60 minutes after eating.
- Try not to lie flat on your back, especially after meals.
- If you get a lot of indigestion at night, avoid eating, or drinking tea or coffee, for three to four hours before you go to bed. Sleep in a semi-upright position, propped up on pillows. If you need a drink, have water.
- Try to get to and maintain a healthy weight.
- If you smoke, try to stop or cut down. The chemicals in cigarette smoke may make indigestion worse. Our information on giving up smoking has tips on how to stop smoking. Order our booklet **Giving up smoking** or visit macmillan.org.uk/smoking



Changes to your appetite

Tips if you have a poor appetite

During cancer treatment, you may lose your appetite. This may be because you feel sick or tired, or because food and drink taste different. These tips might help:

- Instead of three big meals a day, try eating small, frequent meals or snacks. If you find certain times of the day are better for you to eat, make the most of these times.
- Keep snacks handy to eat whenever you can. Bags of nuts or crisps, dried fruit or cheese and crackers are quite light and tasty. If these are hard for you to chew or swallow, try yoghurt, peanut butter or fromage frais instead.
- Try to make your food look as attractive as possible. Put small portions on your plate and garnish the food with lemon, tomato or parsley. You could use a small plate to serve food on.
- You may want to try stimulating your appetite with a small sherry or brandy half an hour before you eat. A glass of wine with meals may also help digestion. Check with your doctor that you can have alcohol.
- If you have recently had surgery or radiotherapy for bowel cancer, you may need advice about the best foods for you. Discuss this with a dietitian, your specialist nurse or doctor.
- Sweet or savoury nourishing drinks can be used alongside small meals. These can also be sipped slowly through the day.
- Eat your meals slowly, chew the food well and relax for a little while after each meal.

- Sometimes the smell of cooking can be appetising, but occasionally it can put you off eating. If you have family or friends who would like to help, ask them if they could cook for you. Or try to eat cold foods that do not need cooking or ready-made foods that can go straight in the oven.
- Everyone's appetite changes and you may have good and bad days. Make the most of the good days by eating well and treating yourself to your favourite foods.
- Try to eat your meals in a room where you feel relaxed and where there are no distractions.
- It may be possible to stimulate your appetite using medicines, such as a low dose of steroids or the hormone medroxyprogesterone. Your doctor may prescribe these for you.

Big appetite due to medicines

Some medicines, such as steroids, may give you a big appetite. This might make you want to eat much more than usual. It is important to try to eat healthy foods such as fruit and vegetables instead of sweets and crisps, so you don't put on too much weight. We have more information about making healthy food choices in our booklet **Healthy eating and cancer**. Call us on **0808 808 00 00** to order a copy.

Your feelings about eating problems

You may feel self-conscious about eating at home or out with family or friends. You may worry that changes in your eating will affect your relationships with your partner, family or friends. Or you may be anxious about what people think of your eating problems.

Many people find that it helps to talk to someone close to them. If you find it difficult to talk about your feelings with your family, you could speak to your doctor, specialist nurse or GP. There are ways they can support you.

We have more information on coping with your emotions in our booklet **How are you feeling? The emotional effects of cancer**. You can order it by calling **0808 808 00 00** or visiting **be.macmillan.org.uk**

'I had to eat up to seven little meals a day. I basically had to learn to eat again after treatment and make adjustments to my daily life.'

Lizzy



Getting help with meals

You may not always feel well enough to cook food for yourself or others. This may be frustrating. If you are the person who usually prepares the meals for your family, it may feel strange to let someone else take charge. Try not to feel guilty about letting someone else do the things you usually do. When you feel better, you can get back into your normal routine.

'My husband was amazing throughout. He became my carer. I went off food totally – all my favourites like spaghetti and stir fries I just couldn't eat, so he changed the menu for me and made new things.'

Julie

If you live on your own and need help with cooking or shopping, contact your GP, district nurse or social worker. They may be able to arrange for a home helper, meals on wheels or a local organisation to help you with cooking or shopping.

Caring for someone with eating problems or weight loss

If you are the main carer for someone with cancer, it can be upsetting and difficult to know how to deal with eating problems such as lack of appetite or weight loss. People who are very ill often do not feel like eating. Cancer, cancer treatments and medicines can all affect someone's appetite. Feeling sick and having diarrhoea or constipation can stop people eating. Or they may feel too tired to eat, have a sore or dry throat or mouth, or find chewing and swallowing difficult.

It can be frustrating and worrying when someone you are caring for cannot eat very much. Mealtimes are often an enjoyable and important part of family and social life. The amount someone can eat may change each day, and their likes and dislikes may also change. Knowing when their appetite is at its best means you can make the most of it and treat them to their favourite foods.

Tips for carers about food preparation and serving food

Preparation

- Take time to ask them what they would like to eat.
- Try to talk openly about their eating problems or weight loss and the different ways you could both manage it. This can help you both feel more in control of the situation.
- Try to give them small meals often, whenever the person feels like eating, rather than at set times of the day.
- Give them their favourite foods at the times when you know their appetite is at its best.
- Keep a range of different foods in the house so that you can offer them something at any time of the day. Remember that tinned foods and pre-prepared frozen meals can be as good for them as a meal that takes a long time to prepare.
- If they cannot manage solid food, try soft foods such as porridge, bananas, soup, shepherd's pie, yoghurt or milk-based foods like custard or rice pudding.
- Make batches of a favourite vegetable soup and freeze some for a quick meal at another time.
- Moist food is often easier to eat and will help to prevent a dry mouth, so try adding sauces or gravies. You may need to use a liquidiser or blender for some dishes.
- You may find it helpful to use home meal delivery companies. Supermarket home delivery services may make shopping easier for you.

- Talk to a dietitian about using energy supplements to add energy to everyday meals and drinks. For example, you could try adding fortified milk to tea or coffee. There are some supplements that do not need a prescription. You can buy these from your local pharmacist. We have more information about manufactured food supplements in our booklet **The building-up diet**.
- Take special care preparing food when the person you care for may be at risk of infections and food poisoning. The doctors or dietitian at the hospital will be able to advise you about this. We have information about food hygiene and lowered immunity on pages 8 to 9.
- The person you are caring for may have side-effects of treatment such as nausea, vomiting, taste changes, a sore mouth or altered bowel habits. A member of their medical team can either prescribe something to help or refer them to a dietitian.

Serving food

- If the person you are caring for finds that cooking smells make them feel sick, prepare food in a different room if possible. Try to serve food in a well-ventilated room.
- Serve small portions and offer second helpings rather than putting too much food on their plate to begin with, as this can be overwhelming and off-putting.
- Try not to worry if they cannot always eat what you have cooked. Gently encourage the person you are caring for to eat, but try not to push them too much. It helps to create a relaxed atmosphere at mealtimes.
- If someone's sense of taste or smell has changed, it can sometimes help to serve food cold or at room temperature.
- Use plastic cutlery if the person affected by cancer notices a metallic taste in their mouth.
- Try to create a comfortable eating environment.
- Serve meals so they look appetising.



Helpful resources about eating problems and cancer

We have listed some helpful resources about eating problems and cancer. These are available to download through the websites provided.

Eating – help yourself. A guide for patients with eating problems, and their families

The Christie NHS Foundation Trust, 2015.
Available from: christie.nhs.uk

This booklet has advice on how to eat well when trying to cope with loss of appetite, changes in taste, dry mouth, difficulties swallowing, feeling full, nausea, diarrhoea and constipation. It has tips on how to make food as nourishing as possible and ideas for snacks and drinks.

Eating well when you have cancer. A guide for cancer patients when eating may be difficult

The Royal Marsden NHS Foundation Trust, 2012.
Available from: royalmarsden.nhs.uk

This booklet has been written to help people eat well when they have a poor appetite or are losing weight. It suggests foods to help maintain a healthy diet, foods to avoid, nourishing and supplementary drinks, and high-energy foods. It includes recipes and sources of further information and support.

Nutritional products. Availability of nutritional drinks, powders and puddings. A guide for patients and carers

The Christie NHS Foundation Trust, 2012.

Available from: christie.nhs.uk

This booklet was designed by dietitians for people with eating difficulties. It describes the supplements available, those that are most suitable, and how each product can be used.

Swallowing & nutrition – when it's difficult

Oesophageal Patients Association, 2013.

Available from: opa.org.uk

This booklet gives advice on eating when swallowing is difficult. It includes tips to help cope with a lack of appetite, indigestion, nausea and diarrhoea. It has information about food supplements, energy supplements and soft, nutritious foods. It also includes helpful recipes.

About our information

We provide expert, up-to-date information about cancer. And all our information is free for everyone.

Order what you need

You may want to order more leaflets or booklets like this one. Visit **be.macmillan.org.uk** or call us on **0808 808 00 00**.

We have booklets on different cancer types, treatments and side effects. We also have information about work, financial issues, diet, life after cancer and information for carers, family and friends.

Online information

All of our information is also available at **macmillan.org.uk/information-and-support**

There you'll also find videos featuring real-life stories from people affected by cancer, and information from health and social care professionals.

Other formats

We also provide information in different languages and formats, including:

- audiobooks
- Braille
- British Sign Language
- easy read booklets
- eBooks
- large print
- translations.

Find out more at **macmillan.org.uk/otherformats**

If you'd like us to produce information in a different format for you, email us at **cancerinformationteam@macmillan.org.uk** or call us on **0808 808 00 00**.

Help us improve our information

We know that the people who use our information are the real experts. That's why we always involve them in our work. If you've been affected by cancer, you can help us improve our information.

We give you the chance to comment on a variety of information including booklets, leaflets and fact sheets.

If you'd like to hear more about becoming a reviewer, email reviewing@macmillan.org.uk You can get involved from home whenever you like, and we don't ask for any special skills – just an interest in our cancer information.



Other ways we can help you

At Macmillan, we know how a cancer diagnosis can affect everything, and we're here to support you.

Talk to us

If you or someone you know is affected by cancer, talking about how you feel and sharing your concerns can really help.

Macmillan Support Line

Our free, confidential phone line is open Monday to Friday, 9am to 8pm. Our cancer support specialists can:

- help with any medical questions you have about cancer or your treatment
- help you access benefits and give you financial guidance
- be there to listen if you need someone to talk to
- tell you about services that can help you in your area.

Call us on **0808 808 00 00** or email us via our website, **macmillan.org.uk/talktous**

Information centres

Our information and support centres are based in hospitals, libraries and mobile centres. There, you can speak with someone face to face.

Visit one to get the information you need, or if you'd like a private chat, most centres have a room where you can speak with someone alone and in confidence.

Find your nearest centre at **macmillan.org.uk/informationcentres** or call us on **0808 808 00 00**.

Talk to others

No one knows more about the impact cancer can have on your life than those who have been through it themselves. That's why we help to bring people together in their communities and online.

Support groups

Whether you are someone living with cancer or a carer, we can help you find support in your local area, so you can speak face to face with people who understand. Find out about support groups in your area by calling us or by visiting [macmillan.org.uk/selfhelpandsupport](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/selfhelpandsupport)

Online Community

Thousands of people use our Online Community to make friends, blog about their experiences and join groups to meet other people going through the same things. You can access it any time of day or night. Share your experiences, ask questions, or just read through people's posts at [macmillan.org.uk/community](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/community)

The Macmillan healthcare team

Our nurses, doctors and other health and social care professionals give expert care and support to individuals and their families. Call us or ask your GP, consultant, district nurse or hospital ward sister if there are any Macmillan professionals near you.

'Everyone is so supportive on the Online Community, they know exactly what you're going through. It can be fun too. It's not all just chats about cancer.'

Mal, Online Community member

Help with money worries

Having cancer can bring extra costs such as hospital parking, travel fares and higher heating bills. If you've been affected in this way, we can help.

Financial guidance

Our financial team can give you guidance on mortgages, pensions, insurance, borrowing and savings.

Help accessing benefits

Our benefits advisers can offer advice and information on benefits, tax credits, grants and loans. They can help you work out what financial help you could be entitled to. They can also help you complete your forms and apply for benefits.

Macmillan Grants

Macmillan offers one-off payments to people with cancer. A grant can be for anything from heating bills or extra clothing to a much-needed break.

Call us on **0808 808 00 00** to speak to a financial guide or benefits adviser, or to find out more about Macmillan Grants. We can also tell you about benefits advisers in your area. Visit **[macmillan.org.uk/financialsupport](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/financialsupport)** to find out more about how we can help you with your finances.

Help with work and cancer

Whether you're an employee, a carer, an employer or are self-employed, we can provide support and information to help you manage cancer at work. Visit **[macmillan.org.uk/work](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/work)**

My Organiser app

Our free mobile app can help you manage your treatment, from appointment times and contact details, to reminders for when to take your medication. Search 'My Organiser' on the Apple App Store or Google Play on your phone.

Other useful organisations

There are lots of other organisations that can give you information or support.

Nutrition and diet information and support

British Dietetic Association (BDA)

Tel 0121 200 8080

Email info@bda.uk.com

www.bda.uk.com

Provides training and facilities for registered dietitians. The website includes food facts, and has information on the role of dietitians and how to find a dietitian.

CORE

Tel 020 7486 0341

Email info@corecharity.org.uk

www.corecharity.org.uk

Funds research into a range of gut, liver, intestinal and bowel illnesses. Its website provides information on digestive disorders, treatments and coping with the effects of digestive disorders.

Diabetes UK

Tel 0345 123 2399

(Mon to Fri, 9am to 6pm)

Email info@diabetes.org.uk

Scotland 0141 212 8710

Email scotland@diabetes.co.uk

www.diabetes.org.uk

Gives information and support on any aspect of managing diabetes, including medication, diet and exercise.

IA – The Ileostomy and Internal Pouch Support Group

Tel 0800 018 4724

Email info@iasupport.org

www.iasupport.org

Aims to help anyone who has had or is about to have their colon removed and has an ileostomy or internal pouch.

Oesophageal Patients' Association

Helpline 0121 704 9860
(Mon to Fri, 9am to 3pm)
24 hour answering machine.

Email enquiries@opa.org.uk
www.opa.org.uk

Provides telephone support for oesophageal cancer patients and their families. Has free leaflets on the association, post-operative recovery, and swallowing problems.

Patients on Intravenous and Nasogastric Nutrition Therapy (PINNT)

www.pinnt.co.uk
Support for people who need artificial nutrition. Aims to encourage contact and mutual support between members.

General cancer support organisations

Cancer Black Care

Tel 020 8961 4151

Email

info@cancerblackcare.org.uk

www.cancerblackcare.org.uk

Offers UK-wide information and support for people with cancer, as well as their friends, carers and families, with a focus on those from BME communities.

Cancer Focus

Northern Ireland

Helpline 0800 783 3339

(Mon to Fri, 9am to 1pm)

Email

nurseline@cancerfocusni.org

www.cancerfocusni.org

Offers a variety of services to people affected by cancer in Northern Ireland, including a free helpline, counselling and links to local support groups.

Cancer Research UK

Helpline 0808 800 4040

(Mon to Fri, 9am to 5pm)

www.cancerresearchuk.org

A UK-wide organisation that has patient information on all types of cancer. Also has a clinical trials database.

Cancer Support Scotland

Tel 0800 652 4531

(Mon to Fri, 9am to 5pm)

Email

info@cancersupportscotland.org

www.

cancersupportscotland.org

Runs cancer support groups throughout Scotland. Also offers free complementary therapies and counselling to anyone affected by cancer.

Macmillan Cancer Voices

**www.macmillan.org.uk/
cancervoices**

A UK-wide network that enables people who have or have had cancer, and those close to them such as family and carers, to speak out about their experience of cancer.

Maggie's Centres

Tel 0300 123 1801

Email

enquiries@maggiescentres.org

www.maggiescentres.org

Has a network of centres in various locations throughout the UK. Provides free information about cancer and financial benefits. Also offers emotional and social support to people with cancer, their family, and friends.

Penny Brohn UK

Helpline 0303 3000 118

(Mon to Fri, 9.30am to 5pm)

Email

helpline@pennybrohn.org.uk

www.pennybrohn.org.uk

Offers a combination of physical, emotional and spiritual support across the UK, using complementary therapies and self-help techniques.

Riprap

www.riprap.org.uk

Developed especially for teenagers in the UK who have a parent with cancer. Has an online forum where teenagers going through similar experiences can talk to each other for support.

Tenovus

Helpline 0808 808 1010
(Daily, 8am to 8pm)

Email

info@tenovuscancercare.org.uk

www.

tenovuscancercare.org.uk

Aims to help everyone in the UK get equal access to cancer treatment and support. Funds research and provides support such as mobile cancer support units, a free helpline, benefits advice and an online 'Ask the nurse' service.

Emotional and mental health support

Mind

Helpline 0300 123 3393

Text 86463

Email info@mind.org.uk

www.mind.org.uk

Provides information, advice and support to anyone with a mental health problem through its helpline and website.

Samaritans

Helpline 116 123

Email jo@samaritans.org

www.samaritans.org

Samaritans branches are located across England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Provides confidential and non-judgemental emotional support, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, for people experiencing feelings of distress or despair.

Support for carers

Carers Trust

Tel (England) 0300 772 9600

(Mon to Fri, 9am to 5pm)

(Scotland) 0300 123 2008

(Wales) 0292 0090 087

(Northern Ireland)

028 9099 9476

Email info@carers.org

www.carers.org

www.carers.org/carers-services/find-your-local-service (find services local to you here)

Provides support, information, advice and services for people caring at home for a family member or friend. You can find details for UK offices and search for local support on the website.

Carers UK

Helpline

(England, Scotland, Wales)

0808 808 7777

(Mon to Fri, 10am to 4pm)

Helpline (Northern Ireland)

028 9043 9843

Email advice@carersuk.org

www.carersuk.org

Offers information and support to carers across the UK. Has an online forum and can put people in contact with support groups for carers in their area.



You can search for more organisations on our website at macmillan.org.uk/organisations or call us on 0808 808 00 00.

Disclaimer

We make every effort to ensure that the information we provide is accurate and up to date but it should not be relied upon as a substitute for specialist professional advice tailored to your situation. So far as is permitted by law, Macmillan does not accept liability in relation to the use of any information contained in this publication, or third-party information or websites included or referred to in it. Some photos are of models.

Thanks

This booklet has been written, revised and edited by Macmillan's Cancer Support's Cancer Information Development team. It has been approved by our Chief Medical Editor, Dr Tim Iveson, Macmillan Consultant Medical Oncologist.

With thanks to: June Davis, National Cancer Rehabilitation Lead; Lesley Dempsey, Head and Neck Cancer Specialist Nurse; Jo Pain, Specialist Dietitian; Monika Seimicka, Senior Specialist Haematology and TYA Dietitian; Rachel Thompson, Specialist Dietitian (Head and Neck Oncology); and Sarah Wheeldon, Macmillan Oncology Dietitian.

Thanks also to the people affected by cancer who reviewed this edition, and those who shared their stories.

We welcome feedback on our information. If you have any, please contact **cancerinformationteam@macmillan.org.uk**

Sources

We've added an example of one of the sources used in the booklet below. If you'd like further information about the sources we use, please contact us at **cancerinformationteam@macmillan.org.uk**

UK Oral Mucositis in Cancer Group. Oral mucositis guidelines. 2nd Edition. 2015. Available at: www.ukomic.co.uk/pdf/UK_OM_Guidelines.pdf (accessed March 2017).

Can you do something to help?

We hope this booklet has been useful to you. It's just one of our many publications that are available free to anyone affected by cancer. They're produced by our cancer information specialists who, along with our nurses, benefits advisers, campaigners and volunteers, are part of the Macmillan team. When people are facing the toughest fight of their lives, we're there to support them every step of the way.

We want to make sure no one has to go through cancer alone, so we need more people to help us. When the time is right for you, here are some ways in which you can become a part of our team.



Share your cancer experience

Support people living with cancer by telling your story, online, in the media or face to face.

Campaign for change

We need your help to make sure everyone gets the right support. Take an action, big or small, for better cancer care.

Help someone in your community

A lift to an appointment. Help with the shopping. Or just a cup of tea and a chat. Could you lend a hand?

Raise money

Whatever you like doing you can raise money to help. Take part in one of our events or create your own.

Give money

Big or small, every penny helps. To make a one-off donation see over.

Call us to find out more

0300 1000 200

macmillan.org.uk/getinvolved

Please fill in your personal details

Mr/Mrs/Miss/Other _____

Name _____

Surname _____

Address _____

Postcode _____

Phone _____

Email _____

Please accept my gift of £ _____

(Please delete as appropriate)

I enclose a cheque / postal order /
Charity Voucher made payable to
Macmillan Cancer Support

OR debit my:

Visa / MasterCard / CAF Charity
Card / Switch / Maestro

Card number

□□□□	□□□□	□□□□	□□□□
------	------	------	------

Valid from

□□	□□
----	----

Expiry date

□□	□□
----	----

Issue no

□□□

Security number

□□□

Signature _____

Date / / _____

Don't let the taxman keep your money

Do you pay tax? If so, your gift will be worth 25% more to us – at no extra cost to you. All you have to do is tick the box below, and the tax office will give 25p for every pound you give.

- I am a UK tax payer and I would like Macmillan Cancer Support to treat all donations I make or have made to Macmillan Cancer Support in the last 4 years as Gift Aid donations, until I notify you otherwise.

I understand that if I pay less Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax than the amount of Gift Aid claimed on all my donations in that tax year it is my responsibility to pay any difference. I understand Macmillan Cancer Support will reclaim 25p of tax on every £1 that I give.

Macmillan Cancer Support and our trading companies would like to hold your details in order to contact you about our fundraising, campaigning and services for people affected by cancer. If you would prefer us not to use your details in this way please tick this box.

In order to carry out our work we may need to pass your details to agents or partners who act on our behalf.



If you'd rather donate online go to macmillan.org.uk/donate

Please cut out this form and return it in an envelope (no stamp required) to:
Supporter Donations, Macmillan Cancer Support, FREEPOST LON15851,
89 Albert Embankment, London SE1 7UQ

This booklet talks about some common eating problems and why they might happen. It also suggests some practical ways to manage them. There is also information for carers, family members and friends.

We're here to help everyone with cancer live life as fully as they can, providing physical, financial and emotional support. So whatever cancer throws your way, we're right there with you. For information, support or just someone to talk to, call **0808 808 00 00** or visit **macmillan.org.uk**

Would you prefer to speak to us in another language? Interpreters are available. Please tell us in English the language you would like to use. Are you deaf or hard of hearing? Call us using NGT (Text Relay) on **18001 0808 808 00 00**, or use the NGT Lite app.

Need information in different languages or formats? We produce information in audio, eBooks, easy read, Braille, large print and translations. To order these, visit **macmillan.org.uk/otherformats** or call our support line.

MACMILLAN
CANCER SUPPORT
RIGHT THERE WITH YOU

© Macmillan Cancer Support, August 2017. 3rd edition. MAC13613_E03_N.
Next planned review 2020. Macmillan Cancer Support, registered charity in England and Wales (261017), Scotland (SC039907) and the Isle of Man (604). Also operating in Northern Ireland.



What's this logo? Visit **macmillan.org.uk/ourinformation**