

Understanding

Diet and cancer

Caring for people with cancer

Understanding

Diet and cancer

This booklet has information on:

- What a cancer diagnosis might mean for how you eat
- Nutrition and treatment
- Coping with diet-related problems during and after treatment
- Diets and supplements

Useful numbers

Dietitian

Specialist nurse

Family doctor (GP)

Surgeon

Medical oncologist

Radiation oncologist

Radiation therapist

Medical social worker

Pharmacist

Emergency

Hospital records number (MRN)



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Fast facts

Why is it important to eat well when you have cancer?

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If you have cancer, your diet during and after treatment is very important. The goal during treatment is to maintain your weight. This will help you to keep up your energy and strength, tolerate your treatment better and recover faster.

If you still have a good appetite, have no unintentional weight loss and are not underweight, you should try to follow a 'balanced' diet'. See page 75 for advice on getting a balanced diet.

If you're underweight or you're having eating difficulties, you may need support and advice about your diet from your doctor, dietitian or specialist nurse. There is information on a high-protein, high calorie 'build-up' diet on page 19, which is the diet advised if you are losing weight or have symptoms that affect your ability to eat.

What are common diet-related problems during treatment?

Page 37

Common eating problems include poor appetite; taste and smell changes; sore mouth, gums or throat; difficulty swallowing; nausea; vomiting; diarrhoea. You may also lose muscle, which can make you feel weaker and more tired. You may also lose or gain weight.

Will I need a special diet or supplements? Page 53

Don't change your diet without advice from your doctor or dietitian. They will talk to you about the foods you should eat or avoid and help you if you're having any diet-related problems. Vitamin and mineral supplements are not recommended during cancer treatment unless advised by your doctor.

How can I build myself up?

Page 17

During cancer treatment, some people are advised to eat a high-protein, high-calorie 'build-up' diet, to help them maintain their weight. You should be advised to follow this type of diet if you are losing weight unintentionally, if you're having difficulty eating or if you are underweight.

We're here for you

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If you or your family have any questions or worries, want to know where to get support, or if you just need to talk, you can talk to one of our cancer nurses.

Ways to get in touch

- Call our Support Line on 1800 200 700
- Drop into a Daffodil Centre to speak to a nurse.
Email daffodilcentreinfo@irishcancer.ie to find your local Daffodil Centre.
- Email us: supportline@irishcancer.ie

See pages 91-98 for more about our services.

Reading this booklet



This booklet is to help you throughout your cancer treatment and afterwards. You will probably find different sections useful at different times, so keep it for reference.

If you need more information or don't understand something, ask your doctor, nurse or dietitian. You can also ask one of our cancer nurses:

- Call our Support Line on Freephone 1800 200 700
- Visit a Daffodil Centre
- Email the nurses at supportline@irishcancer.ie

About our information

While we make every effort to ensure the information in this booklet is correct and up to date, diet and nutrition information can change. You should always talk to your own medical team about your situation. They know your medical history best and your individual circumstances.

Cancer and your diet

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Email: supportline@irishcancer.ie

Why is it important to eat well when you have cancer?

Eating a well-balanced diet, which gives your body the nutrients it needs, can help you to:

- Feel better
- Keep up your energy and strength
- Keep your weight stable
- Avoid muscle loss
- Tolerate your treatment better, so you can feel as well as possible and finish your course of treatment
- Cope better with side-effects of treatment
- Reduce your risk of infection and other complications
- Recover faster



Do I need to change my diet?

If you still have a good appetite, have not experienced unintentional weight loss and are not underweight, you should try to follow a balanced diet. See page 75 for advice on getting a balanced diet.

Some people may need to eat differently during or after treatment to get the right nutrients and to keep a healthy body weight. For example:

- If you have lost weight because of the cancer or treatment side-effects, you may need to eat more calories and protein than before. See page 19 for more about this 'build-up' diet.
- If you have a particular side-effect, you may need to change your eating habits or the food you eat. For example, soft, smooth foods for a sore mouth or swallowing difficulties, high-fibre foods for constipation, low-fibre foods for diarrhoea. See page 37 for more about the types of eating difficulties that can happen during and after cancer treatment.

Monitor your weight

It's a good idea to weigh yourself every two weeks during your cancer treatment and let your medical team know if you're losing weight.

Aim to keep your weight steady during your cancer treatment regardless of your body weight before treatment. Even if you are overweight or obese, you should try to maintain your weight (unless specifically advised to lose weight by your oncologist or haematologist). Weight loss during treatment can impact how you cope during your treatment. It can also make you feel more tired.

Your medical team can help you with any particular eating difficulties you may be having.

If you're having eating difficulties or have any concerns or questions about your weight or your diet, you should mention this to your doctor, dietitian or specialist nurse. Ask to be referred to a dietitian if you haven't been already.

Before treatment

In most hospitals, your weight and height will be measured before treatment starts. You should be asked if you have lost any weight recently and if so, how much. It is a good idea to weigh yourself at home while you're waiting for your treatment to begin. You can also talk about:

- Any eating problems you have
- Any situations where you find it hard to eat
- Any problems you've had in the past with eating or drinking

It is worth thinking about this before your appointment, so that you're ready to answer any questions about your eating habits.

If you're overweight...

This is not the right time to try to reduce your weight (unless specifically advised to by your oncologist or haematologist), as this can lead to loss of muscle mass. Loss of muscle mass can make you feel weaker and more tired. It can also make you more likely to pick up infections. You should focus on having a well-balanced diet (see page 75) and keeping as active as you can. You may like to consider looking at your ideal weight after your treatment has finished.

Support Line Freephone 1800 200 700

Getting the best advice about diet and cancer

Dietitians

Dietitians are experts on nutrition. They are trained to give you advice on the most suitable diet for you and on dealing with any eating difficulties you have, based on the latest scientific evidence. They can also help you if you need specialised treatments such as tube feeding or modified consistencies (for example, a soft or liquid diet). Your dietitian may put you in touch with services in the community too.

Other members of your medical team, such as your consultant, cancer nurse or a speech and language therapist may also help you. See page 15 for more.

Dietitians, nutritionists and nutritional therapists – what's the difference?

Dietitians are fully qualified and regulated healthcare professionals. Only those who have the required qualifications and continue to maintain their knowledge and skills through continuing professional development can use the title 'Registered Dietitian' or 'Dietitian/Dietician'. Dietitians are also the only nutrition professionals who can be employed by the HSE to work in a hospital or community setting.

Nutritionists who have studied for a degree in nutrition or nutritional science are qualified to provide information about food and healthy eating. However, as this profession is not regulated by law, anybody can call themselves a nutritionist, even those with little training in this area.

Nutritional therapists are not regulated either. There are all sorts of courses which claim to train nutritional therapists, including online courses. The advice or services offered by these therapists may not be based on the latest scientific evidence. As a result, they may be ineffective, inappropriate or even unsafe.

It's best to talk to a dietitian for advice if you have cancer. You can ask to be referred to a dietitian in the hospital where you are receiving your cancer treatment. If there is no dietitian available in your hospital, your GP may be able to refer you to a community dietitian.



Getting support

You may feel tired or unwell during or after treatment. You may not feel like shopping or cooking and may not eat well as a result. If you're feeling anxious or depressed, this can also affect your appetite. Here are some tips that might make things easier:

- Tell your medical team if you have worries or questions about your weight or your diet.
- Tell your doctor if you're feeling anxious, depressed, fatigued or have other side-effects that are making it harder for you to eat well.
- Ask for help with cooking and shopping if you have friends and family around.
- Accept help if someone offers, even if you usually prefer to do things yourself. Make a list of things that people can help you with so you have suggestions ready if anyone asks.
- If you live alone or need someone to prepare food, tell your hospital team so they can help you to arrange help before you go home. There may also be a 'meals-on-wheels' service, which can deliver meals to you.
- Find out if your local shops can deliver your shopping if you order it over the phone.
- If you or someone you know has internet access, order your shopping online from a supermarket.
- Plan and prepare meals in advance – make more than one portion so you can save or freeze the rest.
- Think about home delivery from restaurants, but pick nutritious foods.
- Have nutritious snacks or ready-meals at home, for when you don't feel like cooking.

Other people who can support you

Clinical nurse specialist/oncology liaison nurse: These are specially trained nurses who work in a cancer care unit. They can give you and your family advice and support throughout treatment, including help with your diet. They can refer you to a dietitian too.

Speech and language therapist: This is an expert on eating, drinking and swallowing difficulties. They are based in hospitals and in the community and are trained to assess swallowing problems. They can advise you on how to manage a dry or sore mouth and on the safest drinks and foods for you to swallow.

Pharmacist: Your community and hospital pharmacists can give you advice on possible side-effects from your medication and check for interactions with other medicines, foods and supplements.

Physiotherapist: Physiotherapists can advise you on exercises to help you feel as well as possible – before or after treatment. They can also assist with mobility and physical function.

Irish Cancer Society nurses: Call our Support Line on 1800 200 700 or visit a Daffodil Centre to get advice from a cancer nurse on eating problems and meal suggestions.

Support groups: Someone with a similar cancer and treatment as yours can give you practical advice about living with cancer. They may have useful tips about eating problems too.

Email: supportline@irishcancer.ie



If you need building up

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Build-up diet for cancer patients

If you're underweight or have a poor appetite, your doctor, nurse and dietitian may advise you to follow a diet high in protein and energy (calories) to help you to build up your strength.

General tips for building yourself up include:

- Eat nutritious snacks and meals regularly during the day rather than 3 main meals – eat every 3 hours / 4-6 times a day.
- Make the most of your appetite to eat nutritious, high-energy foods and drinks.
- Avoid diet or low-fat versions of food.
- Add fats and calories by using full-fat dairy products, oils and frying or roasting some foods.
- Ask your doctor or dietitian about build-up drinks.
- Try to plan ahead so you have the right foods at home.

Eating more calories



It may seem strange to be told to eat more calories, but cancer and its treatment can put extra demands on your body. Eating a high-protein, high-energy diet will help you to maintain your energy, support your immune system, reduce the risk of complications such as infections and falls, and help you recover from your treatment.

Support Line Freephone 1800 200 700

Which foods have a lot of protein?

Good sources of protein include:

- Meat
- Fish
- Eggs
- Dairy products such as milk, cheese and yoghurt
- Tofu
- Nuts
- Pulses such as beans and lentils

Tips to get more protein



- Try to include protein in at least 2 meals per day, rather than only at 1 meal.
- Eat more hard and soft cheeses. Add them to food where possible.
- Use full-fat milk as a nutritious drink. Use it to also make smoothies and in cooking whenever possible.
- Add high-protein milk or yogurt to drinks, fruit and cereals.
- Add chopped hard-boiled eggs to salads, vegetables, casseroles. Avoid raw eggs.
- Add nuts, seeds and wheat-germ to your food. Add to casseroles, salads, breads, biscuits.
- Add chopped meat or fish to vegetables, salads, casseroles, soups, baked potatoes.
- Add hummus to sandwiches and salads or have with crackers.
- Eat more beans, lentils and peas. Add to soups and casseroles.



Which foods have a lot of energy (calories)?

Foods that are high in fat tend to have the most calories. This means foods like butter, oil, cream, nuts and cheese.

Tips to get more calories



- Add butter or olive oil to mashed and baked potatoes, sauces, cooked vegetables, rice. Drizzle olive oil over soup before serving.
- Add whipped cream, full-fat yogurt or Greek yoghurt to desserts, puddings and fruit.
- Add cream to soups, sauces, custards, cereals. It can also be added to mashed potatoes and puréed vegetables.
- Add cheese to casseroles, potatoes, vegetables, omelettes, sandwiches.
- Sauté or fry foods if you can tolerate them.
- Add sauces or gravies to your food.
- Add ground almonds or other nuts to porridge, cereals or desserts.
- Add hummus, guacamole, nut butter or cream cheese to sandwiches or as a snack with crackers, toast or breadsticks.



Build-up meal ideas

Breakfast ideas

- Scrambled, poached, boiled or fried egg with bread and full-fat spread or butter
- Avocado on toast
- Porridge with full-fat milk/cream and tinned fruit, for example, prunes, peaches, pears
- Full-fat or Greek yogurt, oats, ground almonds and fruit, topped with nuts or seeds
- Toast with peanut or another nut butter, or jam and butter
- Fried bread or French toast (bread dipped in beaten egg and fried)
- Cheese and spinach omelette
- Granola/muesli with milk or yogurt with nuts



Lunch ideas

- Meat, chickpea or lentil-based soup – add cream or coconut milk to normal soup to add calories
- Sandwich or roll filled with chicken, egg, mayonnaise, tuna, nut butter, hummus, sliced meat or non-meat alternative. Have mayo or butter/full-fat spread to add calories
- Baked beans on toast – butter the toast and add cheese for extra calories and protein
- A mixed salad with meat, cheese or vegan protein. Add avocado and seeds for extra protein, healthy fats and nutrients
- Macaroni cheese with tomato and bacon/non-meat alternative
- Bagel with full-fat cream cheese and smoked salmon



Dinner ideas

- Roast or fried meat or fish. Salmon and other oily fish like mackerel and sardines are particularly nutritious
- Pasta with creamy sauce or tomato and vegetable sauce, with plenty of cheese
- Casseroles and stews – add meat, beans or lentils for extra protein and nutrition
- Shepherd's pie or vegetarian/vegan alternative using beans/lentils



Add butter, cream or olive oil to any vegetables you have with your dinner. For example, creamed spinach, buttered carrots or sweetcorn. Fry or roast potatoes or sweet potatoes, or add butter or cream to mashed or boiled potatoes.

Dessert ideas

- Fresh fruit salad with cream or ice cream
- Bananas and cream
- Fruit pie and custard
- Rice pudding



Snack ideas

- Olives, nuts and seeds
- Dips made with cheese or yogurt, such as guacamole, cheese and chive dip, hummus
- Cheese. For example, mini cheese portions, cheese slices
- Breakfast cereal/porridge with lots of toppings – cream, jam, stewed or tinned fruit, nuts and seeds
- Toast with sardines, baked beans or nut butter
- Hot chocolate or milky coffee made with full-fat milk



- Ice cream
- Milkshakes
- Fruit bread or scones with butter or full-fat spread and jam
- Quiche
- Sandwiches or jacket potatoes filled with tuna, chicken or eggs with mayonnaise, cheese, smoked or tinned salmon
- Smoothies made with yogurt or full-fat milk
- Full-fat yogurt or fromage frais. For example, Greek-style yogurt. Add seeds or dried fruit



Build-up drinks or nutritional supplements

You can further supplement your diet by taking a nutritious drink between your meals. You can either make them at home or get them from your local pharmacy. Your doctor or dietitian can recommend and prescribe a suitable one. There is a wide variety of types and flavours. Not all are suitable for everyone, so make sure to consult a healthcare professional.

Some are milky, some are yogurt- or milkshake-style drinks and some are fruity. Some are just 'shots', others are bigger drinks. If you have problems swallowing, there are also puddings and powders to thicken food or drinks.

Over time the protein and calories in these drinks can help you put on weight. Also, your energy levels may improve and make you feel better.

Your dietitian will tell you which ones are suitable for you. Some build-up drinks are not suitable if you have diabetes, kidney failure or other medical conditions.

Fortified milk



1 pint of full-fat milk

Add 3-4 tablespoons of skimmed milk powder

Mix well with whisk or in blender. Store in the fridge for up to 3 days. This high-protein, high-calorie milk can be used for milky drinks such as lattes, smoothies and milkshakes. It can also be used to make soup stock or in porridge and cereal. Alternatively, you can buy high-protein milk in supermarkets.



How might treatment affect how I eat?

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How might treatment affect how I eat?

Some cancer treatments can affect your appetite or how you eat. For example, how you chew, swallow and absorb food.

Before any treatment, your doctor and nurse will explain any possible side-effects. Sometimes it can be hard to know what to expect. It can depend on several things, for example:

- Location of your cancer and if it has spread
- Type of treatment given
- Area being treated
- Amount of treatment given
- Symptoms caused by the cancer
- Side-effects of treatment
- Your own general health



Surgery

Surgery may slow your digestion or your ability to eat. You may need support to make sure you're getting enough calories, protein and other nutrients. Good nutrition will help you to heal and recover after surgery. You might need to be referred to a dietitian for advice on the most suitable diet for you. For example, you might need to eat a soft diet, a build-up diet, or you may need tube feeding after your surgery. Tube feeding is where a small tube is placed in your nose and down into your stomach, or directly into your stomach or bowel. It can give you liquid nutrients.

Possible eating-related problems after surgery include:

- Feeling full
- Cramping
- Pain
- Loss of appetite
- Diarrhoea
- Constipation
- Weight gain or loss
- Taste changes
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Swallowing problems

Some operations make eating hard. For example, surgery to your mouth, tongue, throat, stomach, liver, pancreas or bowel.

See page 37 for tips if you experience any of these problems.

Drug therapies

Chemotherapy, immunotherapy and targeted therapies can have side-effects that can make it harder to eat well:

- Taste and smell changes – food may not taste like it used to or taste more salty, bitter or like chalk or metal
- Loss of appetite
- Sore mouth or throat
- Nausea and vomiting
- Diarrhoea
- Constipation
- Weight loss or gain

See page 37 for tips if you experience any of these problems.

Side-effects can vary and depend on the drug, dosage and your own response to it. Problems often clear up in the weeks and months after treatment ends.

Radiotherapy

Radiotherapy may cause eating problems if an area of the body linked to eating and digestion has been exposed to radiotherapy. How severe any eating problems are depends on the area being treated and for how long. There's advice on coping with these difficulties on pages 37.

Treatment of head and neck may cause:

- Dry mouth
- Sore mouth
- Sore throat
- Difficulty swallowing
- Increased phlegm (spit)
- Taste and smell changes – food may not taste like it used to or taste more salty, bitter or like chalk or metal
- Problems with your teeth or gums

Treatment of lung, oesophagus or breast may cause:

- Loss of appetite
- Nausea and vomiting
- Indigestion
- Difficulty swallowing or pain when swallowing
- Increased phlegm (spit)

Treatment of stomach or pelvis may cause:

- Loss of appetite
- Nausea and vomiting
- Diarrhoea
- Cramping pains
- Bloating
- Wind

If you are having radiotherapy to the pelvis, large amounts of gas in your bowel can affect the area being treated. Avoiding certain foods can help reduce the amount of gas in your bowel. These include beans, pulses, cruciferous vegetables (for example, cabbage, broccoli and cauliflower), onions, fizzy drinks and beer.

After treatment, some of these problems may take longer to clear up or may be permanent. Talk to your radiation therapist, doctor or dietitian for advice about your situation.

Hormone therapy

Some types of hormone therapy can affect your appetite and change how your body deals with fluids. It can cause:

- Increased appetite, which may lead you to put on weight
- Excess fluids in your body (fluid retention)

You can ask your medical team for advice about trying to keep a healthy weight if you're on hormone therapy.



Are there any foods that can affect treatment?

Alcohol

It's best to avoid alcohol, or at least reduce how much you drink, during chemotherapy or targeted therapies. This is because it may affect treatment or dehydrate you. Ask your doctor for advice. Alcohol may also irritate your mouth if you are receiving radiotherapy to your head, neck or chest region. Even small amounts found in mouthwashes can hurt if your mouth is inflamed.

Citrus fruits

Some citrus fruits – particularly grapefruit – can interact with some cancer drugs. Ask your doctor or pharmacist if you should avoid grapefruit or other citrus fruits during treatment.

Herbal products and vitamin/mineral supplements

Herbal products and vitamin/mineral supplements may also affect your treatment. Don't take any supplements unless recommended by your medical team, even if you have used them safely before your treatment. See page 59 for more.

Probiotic foods

Avoid probiotic supplements if you're having chemotherapy. If your white cell count is low, it is best to avoid probiotic foods. See page 36 for more on this or ask your doctor, nurse or dietitian for more advice.

Ask your doctor, pharmacist or dietitian about possible interactions and foods that should be avoided with your medicine.

Food safety

All of us can get sick if we eat unsafe food but some of us are more at risk than others. This information provides safe food principles that can reduce your risk of getting food poisoning. Those most at risk are people having cancer treatment, people recovering from treatment or transplants and those on high-dose steroids.



Food safety tips

- Wash your hands before and after you handle any food.
- Never eat any vegetable, fruit or bread that has signs of mould.
- Take special care when handling raw meats, fish, poultry and eggs.
- Wash all raw fruits and vegetables well. Avoid them if they cannot be washed well.
- Avoid tinned food if there are any bulges on the tin.
- Store raw meats and ready-to-eat foods separately.

- Thaw meat in the fridge and not on the kitchen counter.
- Don't eat foods that have been left out for longer than 90 minutes at room temperature.
- Check use-by dates on all foods and drinks. Don't eat foods or drinks that are out of date.
- Keep kitchen surfaces and utensils clean and wash chopping boards in warm soapy water after use.
- Clean your fridge and cupboards often. Get help from a family member or friend if you have no energy for cleaning.
- If you're feeling ill, don't prepare food for other people.



If your white blood cell count is low...

Some patients may have a low white cell count due to their cancer or treatment. This is called neutropenia. Neutropenia can mean your immune system doesn't work as well to fight off infections like food poisoning.

It is best to avoid the following until your white cell count is normal:

- Raw or lightly cooked eggs
- Raw, smoked or rare meat and fish
- All open foods from a delicatessen counter
- Unpasteurised milk and dairy products. For example, any cheese, milk, yogurt that has not been pasteurised. Cheeses like brie, camembert, feta, stilton and roquefort are often unpasteurised
- Pâté
- Undercooked shellfish
- Homemade mayonnaise
- Probiotic, live or bio-dairy products such as live yogurts and probiotic drinks, as they contain live bacteria

It is fine to eat the 'safer' versions of these foods. For example:

- Well-cooked eggs, meat and shellfish
- Pasteurised milk, cheese and yogurt
- Shop-bought mayonnaise
- Pre-packaged deli items from the chilled shelves, such as coleslaw and sliced meats

If you have a very low white blood cell count (severe neutropenia), you may be advised to follow stricter guidelines and avoid a greater range of foods.

Ask your doctor, nurse or dietitian about food safety and any precautions you should take.

Coping with eating difficulties

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Poor appetite

- Make the most of your appetite when it's good. Eat when and what you want.
- Eat small meals and snacks. Aim to eat every 2-3 hours.
- Eat snacks high in calories and protein. See page 23 for some ideas.
- Use a smaller plate for your meals but choose meals high in calories and protein. Large portions can be off-putting if your appetite is small.
- Eat slowly and chew your food well.
- Choose drinks that give some nutrition, such as milk, smoothies and creamy soup.
- Try build-up drinks which have a balanced mix of nutrients for when it's hard to eat food. Talk to your dietitian about suitable build-up drinks for you. Your doctor can also give you a prescription for these drinks.
- Take only small sips while eating, as drinking might make you full.
- Encourage your family to eat together and make mealtimes relaxing and enjoyable.
- Take regular exercise, if you can, as it may help your appetite. Fresh air can help too.
- Talk to your doctor about medications to help other problems like constipation, nausea, pain or other side-effects of treatment, if they affect your appetite.
- Tell your doctor if you're feeling fatigued, anxious or depressed, as this can also affect your appetite.
- Monitor your weight and ask to be referred to a dietitian if your appetite remains low or you are losing weight.





Taste and smell changes

- Eat foods that appeal to your taste buds and smell good to you. Some people may prefer sweeter foods while others may prefer savoury foods
- Keep your mouth clean by rinsing and brushing – it may improve the taste of foods.
- Eat food cold or at room temperature, if smells bother you.
- Hold off eating foods that no longer appeal to you. Try them again some days or weeks later as you might enjoy them again.
- Flavour foods with onion, garlic, citrus or herbs like mint and basil, if you find them tasteless. However, if you have increased sensitivity to the smell of these flavours, avoid them.



- If you are very sensitive to smells, try to stay out of the kitchen when food is being prepared. Ask friends and family to cook for you if possible.
- Marinate meat, chicken or fish to help the flavour.
- Rinse your mouth with tea, saltwater or baking soda to help clear your taste buds before eating.
- Drink plenty of fluids.
- If some liquids leave an unpleasant taste in your mouth, try drinking decaffeinated tea or coffee, or different flavours of fruit squash drinks.
- If you have a metallic taste in your mouth, limit canned foods and try using plastic cutlery.
- Try chewing fresh or tinned pineapple before meals to get rid of bad tastes.
- In order to avoid a negative connection between certain foods and your cancer treatment, avoid your favourite foods just before or during treatment.



For many people, normal taste comes back in the months after treatment has ended. Some people will experience some longer-term taste changes. Speak to your medical team if you have any concerns about your taste.

Sore mouth, gums or throat

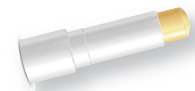
- Take sips of fluids like water or milk often. Drink through a straw if your mouth is painful.
- Eat soft, moist food like omelettes, scrambled eggs, mashed potatoes, cream soups, natural yogurt, milkshakes, stews and puddings.
- Moisten your food with sauces or gravies.
- Purée or liquidise foods in a blender to make them easier to swallow. For example, try soups or smoothies.
- Take cold foods and drinks like milkshakes and smoothies to soothe your mouth.
- Take care with the following as they can make a sore mouth or throat worse:
 - Pickled, salty or spicy foods
 - Rough food, like crispy bread, dry toast or raw vegetables
 - Alcohol and tobacco
 - Citrus juices, like orange, lemon, lime, grapefruit or pineapple
 - Mouthwashes that contain alcohol or acidic ones.
- Ask your doctor about mouthwashes, gels and medications to help with your sore mouth.
- Try rinsing your mouth with a homemade mouthwash made with 1 teaspoon of baking soda (sodium bicarbonate) or 1 teaspoon of salt to 1 pint/half a litre of warm water.
- Ask your doctor and nurse for painkillers if your mouth is painful. They may prescribe some antiseptic or local anaesthetic gels or lozenges.
- Visit your dentist regularly. They can give you advice about caring for your mouth and special mouthwashes.

If you are experiencing difficulty eating or swallowing, highlight this to your medical team as soon as possible.



Dry mouth

- Take sips of fluids like water often. Keep a bottle of water with you when you're out. Sucking ice cubes or ice pops may help too.
- Moisten your food with sauces or gravy.
- Rinse your mouth regularly, especially before and after meals.
- Take care with foods like sandwiches, chocolate, pastry and freshly baked bread as they may stick to the roof of your mouth.
- Use special mouthwashes, gels and moisturisers often. For example, products that contain saliva enzymes. Your doctor or pharmacist can advise you about products to try.
- If you have thick saliva, rinse your mouth often with a baking soda mouthwash. Add 1 teaspoon of baking soda (sodium bicarbonate) to 1 pint/half a litre of warm water.
- Brush your teeth after every meal or snack. Use a soft toothbrush. Put it into a container of warm water to soften the bristles.
- Stimulate the flow of saliva with sugarless gum, boiled sweets or pastilles.
- Keep your lips moist with a lip balm.



Difficulty swallowing

If you have difficulty swallowing or you find fluids are going down the wrong way, tell your medical team as soon as possible. You may need to see a speech and language therapist who can assess your swallow and recommend safe foods and fluids for you to eat and drink. Sometimes, people may need to use a thickener which they can add to their fluids to make it safer to swallow. The following tips may also help:

- Eat your favourite foods but soften them with sauces and gravies, where possible.
- Try eating soft, liquid foods like soups, milkshakes, custards and natural yogurt. But vary them so you don't get bored. Make sure soups have potato, lentils, tender or minced meat or fish in them for extra nourishment.
- Put small amounts of food into your mouth and chew them properly before you try to swallow.
- Chop up meat and vegetables finely for stews or casseroles.
- Blend or liquidise cooked foods if required.
- Eat small, frequent meals.
- Sit up for all your meals if possible. Try to remain seated upright for 20–30 minutes after eating.
- Take build-up drinks, which are high in calories and protein. Your dietitian or doctor can recommend or prescribe them.
- Drink at least 6 to 8 cups of fluid each day.



Indigestion

- Talk to your doctor or pharmacist about antacid medications.
- Try to eat small frequent meals instead of large ones.
- Herbal teas like mint or liquorice may help.
- Avoid fizzy drinks, alcohol, spicy foods, pickles and citrus fruits.
- If indigestion is worse at night, avoid eating or drinking for a few hours before bedtime.
- Sit upright for 20–30 minutes after eating.



Feeling full

- Eat smaller meals 3 times a day and try adding 2–3 small snacks. Use 'build-up' meal ideas if you are eating less during the day or if you have lost weight. See pages 22–24 for ideas.
- As you begin to feel less full, gradually increase the amounts of food and the time between meals.
- Avoid foods high in fibre to prevent you feeling full very quickly. For example, large portions of fruit and vegetables, wholegrain rice, wholegrain pasta and wholemeal bread.
- Don't drink large amounts of liquids before or during meals.



Nausea (feeling sick)

- Talk to your doctor if you're feeling sick. There are medicines to help. Take them as directed.
- Eat before you get hungry, as hunger can make nausea worse.
- If you are sensitive to the smell of cooking, try using ready meals or avoid being in the kitchen while food cooks. Ask a friend or family member to help with cooking if possible.
- Try getting some fresh air before mealtimes.
- Eating little and often may help. Eat slowly and chew food well.
- Sip on clear liquids to prevent getting dehydrated between meals.
- Take plenty of nourishing fluids if you miss a meal or two.
- Rest after your meals.
- Try the following foods and drinks, as they might help:
 - Cold, bland foods like yogurt, desserts, boiled potatoes, rice, noodles, breakfast cereal or cheese
 - Dry food like toast, scones, crackers or breakfast cereals. This can help in the morning before you get up
 - Herbal teas like mint
 - Foods containing ginger, such as ginger ale or tea, ginger nut biscuits, ginger cake or fresh ginger in hot water
- Some people find the following foods make nausea worse:
 - Fatty, greasy or fried foods
 - Spicy foods
 - Very sugary foods
 - Foods with a strong smell, like onions and garlic
- Eat foods that you like or are able to tolerate. When your nausea subsides, try other foods for variety (if you can tolerate them).
- Some people find relaxation exercises, acupuncture or meditation can help with their nausea. Check with your doctor if you're thinking of trying acupuncture, to be sure it's safe for you.



Vomiting

- Ask your doctor and nurse about any anti-sickness medication you could take. Take it as advised.
- Try to drink small amounts of clear liquids like water.
- Carry on taking small amounts of liquid as often as you can keep them down.
- A rest after meals may help prevent vomiting, but don't lie down too flat after eating.
- Relaxation exercises or acupuncture can sometimes help to prevent vomiting. Check with your doctor before trying acupuncture – if your immune system is low, it may be best to avoid it.
- Call your doctor if the vomiting continues or gets worse.



Cramping

- Eat and drink slowly. Small mouthfuls and chewing well can help.
- Certain food and drink can cause wind or cramps. For example, beer, beans, cabbage, spicy foods and sugar-free gum and sweets made with sorbitol, mannitol or xylitol.
- Let fizzy drinks go flat before drinking them.
- Herbal teas like mint or liquorice may help.
- Gentle exercise like walking can ease cramps.

Bloating

- Constipation can cause bloating, speak to your medical team for ways to manage constipation.
- Avoid gassy foods like beans, brussels sprouts, cabbage, onions, garlic.
- Avoid fizzy drinks and beer.
- Eat and drink slowly and chew your food well.
- Don't skip meals.
- Add fibre to your diet slowly. For example, small amounts of vegetables, fresh and dried fruits, and wholegrains. Fibre may make bloating worse for some people.
- Avoid chewing gum and sucking on hard sweets.
- Don't smoke.
- Talk to your doctor and nurse to see if your medication is causing the bloating.
- Ask your doctor or nurse if any over-the-counter preparations can help.
- Exercise regularly if you can. Try to get at least 30 minutes of exercise each day.

Diarrhoea

- Drink plenty of fluids to replace what you lose with diarrhoea. Drink liquids 30 minutes to 1 hour after your meal and/or between meals.
- Eat small amounts of food during the day instead of 3 large meals.
- Your doctor may prescribe something to control the diarrhoea. Take this as advised.
- Take care with the following foods as they can make diarrhoea worse:
 - Fatty, greasy and fried foods
 - Fizzy drinks
 - Drinks with caffeine like coffee, tea, cola and hot chocolate
 - Citrus fruits, like orange and grapefruit, and tomato juices
 - Foods containing the artificial sweetener sorbitol such as chewing gum and diet or low-calorie products
- Avoid alcohol and tobacco. They can make diarrhoea worse.
- Try foods which are easier to digest, like white rice, white pasta and ripe bananas.
- Ask your doctor or dietitian about probiotics. They may recommend trialling a probiotic product, but only when you have finished your treatment and your immune system has recovered.
- Call your doctor if the diarrhoea continues or gets worse, or if your stools (poos) are red or dark in colour.

If you are having immunotherapy, diarrhoea could be a sign that your bowel (colon) is inflamed. Tell your doctor or nurse if you are passing bowel motions (pooing) more often or if they are soft, loose or watery.

Constipation

- Drink plenty of fluids. For example, 2 litres of fluid every day.
- Eat regular meals.
- Eat foods high in fibre. For example, wholegrain cereals, wholegrain breads, brown rice, wholewheat pasta, pulses (peas, beans and lentils), vegetables and fruit.
- Drink fig syrup or prune juice.
- Try adding flaxseed to cereal, yogurt or porridge to add extra fibre.
- Try sitting in this special position on the toilet:
 - Use a footrest to get your knees higher than your hips.
 - Lean forwards and put your elbows on your knees
 - Push out your tummy (abdomen) and straighten your spine
- Get some gentle exercise.
- Ask your doctor for a suitable laxative, especially if you are taking painkillers or anti-sickness medication that cause constipation.



Fatigue (too tired to cook or eat)

- Prepare meals in advance when you have the energy. Freeze them for when you feel too tired to cook.
- Have nourishing drinks when you don't feel like eating.
- Buy healthy ready-made meals like frozen meals, takeaways, tinned foods.
- Ask family and friends to help you shop, prepare and cook food. Use online shopping if possible.
- Get enough rest. Nap during the day, as long as it doesn't stop you sleeping at night.
- Get some regular exercise, if possible. Physical activity like walking has been shown to minimise fatigue.



Weight loss

Weight loss can happen because of the cancer itself or because of eating difficulties caused by treatment. The tips on the previous pages may help if your weight loss is caused by eating difficulties such as poor appetite (page 39), feeling sick (page 46) or taste changes (page 40). Or you may benefit from a 'build-up' (high-protein, high-calorie) diet (see page 19).

Always tell your medical team if you're losing weight.

Too much weight gain

Weight gain can happen for many reasons. It can be a side-effect of steroids, hormone therapy or other medications. You may also put on weight if your eating habits change or if you're not as physically active as before. Changes in hormone levels can also impact weight gain.

Usually, patients will be advised to follow a balanced diet and not to try to lose weight during treatment. Talk to your medical team if you're worried about your weight.

Other problems

If you have any eating problems that are not covered in this booklet, speak to your doctor, nurse or dietitian for individual advice. You can also call our Support Line on 1800 200 700 or visit a Daffodil Centre to speak to a cancer nurse.

Other diets and supplements

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Should I follow a 'special' diet?

After a cancer diagnosis most people want to do everything they can to feel as well as possible and help their recovery. You might think that following a special diet or taking supplements, such as herbal or vitamin pills, might be healthier or help you to fight cancer.

However, it is best not to experiment with special diets while on treatment. Diets not recommended by your doctor or dietitian can do more harm than good.

Why the experts don't recommend 'fad' diets

- There is no scientific proof that any special diet can control cancer or stop it coming back.
- For most people, a balanced diet is best, which means eating a variety of foods. Special diets often ask you to cut out certain foods or eat a lot of one type of food, which could lead to nutritional deficiencies that make you feel fatigued (tired) or unwell. Restricting your diet can also lead to weight and muscle loss, so you may be less able to tolerate your treatment.
- It's important to keep your strength up and avoid weight loss where possible. Many 'special' diets tend to be low calorie, which may mean you lose weight and muscle mass.



Examples of diets that you may have heard about

There is no scientific evidence that any of these diets improve outcomes for people with cancer.

Low-sugar diet

This is based around the false idea that by reducing the amount of sugar in your diet, you can 'starve' the cancer and stop it growing. Sugar in your diet does not help cancer to grow. But sugar contains no nutrients needed by the body, apart from energy, and we can get all the energy we need from healthier sources. So it's best to limit the amount of sugar you eat as part of a well-balanced diet. When eating foods that contain sugar, opt for those that are also full of vitamins and minerals, such as fruit, vegetables and wholegrain bread. See the food pyramid on pages 80-81 for more information.



Dairy-free diet

Many research studies have looked for a link between diets that are high in dairy products and cancer, especially breast and prostate cancer. But these studies have not shown a clear link. Because of this, cancer experts do not recommend following a dairy-free diet to reduce the risk of cancer. Dairy products are an important source of protein, calcium and some vitamins. These nutrients are important for bone and muscle health. If you choose to have a dairy-free alternative, you are advised to choose one with added calcium and vitamin D.



Juicing

Fruit and vegetables contain lots of important nutrients that have been shown to reduce the risk of some cancers. Juicing involves extracting juices from fresh fruit and uncooked vegetables. Juicing can add variety to the diet and can be a good way to eat more vegetables and fruit if chewing or swallowing is a problem.

However, it is better to eat whole fruit and vegetables if possible and you should not replace meals with juices. Juices may be less filling than whole vegetables and fruits and often contain less fibre.

Ketogenic diet

The ketogenic diet is high in fat and low in carbohydrates, with moderate amounts of protein. The purpose of the diet is to try to make the body break down body fat for energy instead of carbohydrates, a state known as ketosis. There is ongoing research in this area but there is no evidence to show that this diet can help cancer patients live longer. Following a diet like this, many patients experience weight loss and nausea, which may impact how well they can tolerate their cancer treatment.

Alkaline diet

The alkaline diet is based on the belief that certain foods can affect the pH of bodily fluids and can therefore be used to prevent or treat illness. As part of this diet, foods such as meat, fish and dairy products are often avoided.

The alkaline diet can lead to a reduction in calorie and protein intake, which may result in weight and muscle loss. It may also reduce your intake of a variety of important vitamins and minerals.

It is not recommended for cancer patients because of a lack of scientific evidence.

Detoxing

Some people believe that a special diet or procedure, such as a colonic irrigation or coffee enemas, can help their bodies to recover from the effects of chemotherapy drugs. There is no evidence that detoxing helps your body. Furthermore, enemas and colonic irrigation can be dangerous, especially when your immune system is low. They can lead to dehydration, chemical imbalances and infections.

Detoxing also restricts dietary intake which can lead to weight loss, muscle loss and nutritional deficiencies.

Organic foods

Organic foods are produced using methods of organic farming, which don't use pesticides. Some people worry that pesticides used in non-organic farming may cause cancer. In the EU, there are regulations on the use of pesticides and laws to ensure that agricultural pesticides are used within a safe level. There's no evidence that these small amounts on our food increase the overall risk of cancer in people who eat them.



There is strong evidence that a diet rich in fruits and vegetables has an important role to play in cancer prevention. Try to include these in your diet as much as you can, whether organic or non-organic - they are all beneficial.

Discuss your diet and any plans to change your diet with your doctor or dietitian – they have the expertise to advise you what will be best for you.

Should I take supplements?

Vitamins and minerals

Vitamins and minerals are important for your health, so try to have a varied, balanced diet that will give you vitamins, minerals and plant substances (phytochemicals). Fresh vegetables and fruit are good sources of phytochemicals.

Most people get all the nutrients they need from a balanced and varied diet. Your doctor or dietitian will tell you if you need to take a vitamin or mineral supplement. For example, if you're having problems absorbing nutrients from your food.

Some people with cancer take large amounts of vitamins thinking it will boost their immune system or help their body to fight cancer. There's no evidence for this. In fact, large doses of some vitamins and minerals can be harmful or may interfere with your treatment. For example:

- Too much vitamin A can cause liver or bone damage.
- Too much vitamin C can affect how radiotherapy or chemotherapy work.
- Vitamin B9 supplement may interfere with some cancer drugs, such as methotrexate. It may also affect your white cell count after chemotherapy.

Herbal/plant-based supplements

Some herbal/plant products may be harmful or interact with your medications, so it is important to discuss these with your medical team, even if you used them safely before your diagnosis.

If you have cancer, don't take supplements unless your doctor tells you to.

Making sense of health claims

Sometimes you may read how a particular diet or foodstuff helped a person, or see what seems to be very convincing evidence about a miracle cure. It can be hard to know what to believe.

Unfortunately, it's easy for people to make claims online without any real proof. Here are some tips to help you stay safe:

- **Be suspicious if a claim is based on one person's experience.** Personal stories are interesting to read and often feel very convincing, but one person's experience is not a good basis for making decisions about your health.
- **Avoid sites showing ads or selling services or products.** If a webpage is making money – for example by selling a 'cure' – there's more reason for them to exaggerate or give misleading or incomplete information.
- **Look closely at the website – does it have contact details and information about the qualifications of the person writing the information?** If someone is claiming to have certain qualifications, are they regulated? For example, are they a regulated dietitian or an unregulated nutritional therapist? (See page 12 for more on the differences between nutrition professionals.)

- **Use independent, reliable websites,** like cancer organisations and government websites, for information and to check out if there's any real scientific evidence for what you've read. Ask your medical team for recommendations. The Irish Cancer Society's website, www.cancer.ie, is constantly being reviewed to ensure that the information is up-to-date and based on good scientific evidence.
- **Check with your medical team** if you're not sure about something you've heard.
- **Speak to a cancer nurse on our Support Line.** Freephone 1800 200 700 or email supportline@irishcancer.ie
- **Speak to a cancer nurse in a Daffodil Centre.** Daffodil Centres are located in 13 hospitals nationwide. Email daffodilcentreinfo@irishcancer.ie for contact details of your nearest centre.





Nutrition and advanced cancer

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Support for eating problems

Many people with advanced cancer find that they lose weight and that their appetite becomes smaller. This can be due to side-effects of treatment, symptoms of cancer or the cancer itself. You may find, for example, that the amount of food you eat or the type of food that you like changes from day to day or from hour to hour for no reason. So it's important to eat the foods that you most enjoy and aim to have small meals when you feel able to eat.

Discuss changes in your appetite and weight with your doctor, nurse or dietitian. A dietitian can help to improve your comfort at mealtimes.



Hints and tips: Good nutrition for advanced cancer

- **Choose food and drinks you enjoy and that you can tolerate.**
- **If you don't feel you can manage large meals, aim to have a small meal or snack every 2 to 3 hours.** Using a smaller plate can help if you find large meals off-putting. See pages 22-24 for high-calorie meal and snack ideas.
- **If you find eating is hard work, try soft food so you do not need to chew as much.** For example, porridge, soup, stew or casserole, poached fish, ice cream, stewed fruits, bananas, custard or milk puddings, jelly, mousse, trifle or scrambled eggs. If you cannot eat solid food, try taking yogurt drinks, milkshakes, smoothies or build-up drinks. Talk to your dietitian, doctor or nurse about these drinks.
- **If you find preparing food makes you tired, try to use fresh ready-made meals or tinned or frozen foods.** Accept help from family members and friends as well. You could also find out about meal-delivery companies or chat to local pubs and restaurants to see if they will give you a discount if you plan to order from them regularly.

Email: supportline@irishcancer.ie

Pressure to eat

Sometimes family members and carers can put pressure on you to eat or they might watch what you eat. You might find this upsetting. It might even put you off your food. Remember your family or carer only does this out of love and concern for you. Do tell them that you appreciate their efforts.

Try not to worry that you are upsetting your family and friends if you don't eat. But it can help to talk to them about how you are feeling. For example, let them know if your appetite is poor and ask them to bring you the foods you enjoy but in small amounts.

Severe weight loss (cancer cachexia)

Sometimes severe and unintentional weight loss can happen. This is known as cachexia. It causes a lot of weight loss and loss of strength and muscle mass.

Cachexia is more common in people with advanced cancer.

Symptoms include:

- Having little or no appetite
- Losing weight, muscle and fat, even if you are eating
- Feeling very weak
- Feeling full after eating small amounts
- Anaemia (low levels of red blood cells)

If you notice severe weight loss, please speak to your doctor, nurse specialist or dietitian immediately.

Support Line Freephone 1800 200 700

Tips for carers

When your friend or loved one is ill, it is natural to want to feed them as well as possible. Sometimes this is not so easy. Difficulty in eating is a problem faced by many people with advanced cancer.



Here are some things to consider at this time:

- Ask what foods they would prefer to eat.
- Don't force them into eating and drinking. Encourage without being pushy.
- Expect that their food tastes will change from day to day. They may go off their favourite food or else try something that was not tolerated the day before.
- Have a variety of snacks in the house so that if a meal is refused you can offer something else. Discuss what type of snacks they would prefer.
- Put small amounts of food on a small plate so the amount is not overwhelming.



- Offer small, frequent meals and snacks every 2 hours.
- Offer soft or liquid foods if they are having problems swallowing.
- Present food in an attractive way.
- If they can't eat, encourage them to drink plenty of fluids.
- Avoid liquids with meals to prevent them feeling full, unless needed to help with dry mouth and swallowing.
- Ask the dietitian for advice on suitable foods, build-up drinks and products.
- Eating problems can be upsetting for people with advanced cancer. Try not to get upset if they don't eat your carefully prepared meals. Instead talk about what type of foods they would prefer and offer these in small amounts. Focus on their enjoyment of food rather than the amount of food they are eating.
- If they have lost a lot of weight, it can help to get clothes in a smaller size.
- If they have dentures, check that they still fit as well.



Nutrition after treatment

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Your diet after treatment

Once your treatment is over, you may still have some eating difficulties. There are tips for coping with different eating difficulties on pages 37-51.

Try to talk to your medical team about your diet before you're discharged or at your follow-up appointments. Ask for a name and phone number so you know who to contact if you have any worries at home.

Some local cancer support centres have sessions where you can learn more about diet and nutrition. See page 98 for more about support centres.

Preparing meals

- It may take some time before you feel more like yourself. Don't worry if you don't feel like cooking home-cooked meals straightaway.
- Make simple meals using easy-to-prepare recipes.
- Buy some prepared foods like grated cheese or peeled and chopped vegetables to make cooking easier.
- Stock up on your favourite foods so you can shop less often.
- Buy foods you are able to eat even when ill.
- Cook enough for 2 or 3 meals.
- Freeze foods in meal-sized portions.
- Buy healthy ready meals for times when you don't feel like cooking.
- Don't be afraid to ask a friend or family member for help with cooking or shopping.
- Ask the medical social worker in your hospital to arrange a home help for you if you live alone.

Living a healthy lifestyle

There's evidence that making healthy lifestyle choices can help you to feel well and also reduce your risk of cancer in the future.

- Try to be a healthy weight for your height. Speak to your doctor or dietitian about this.
- Be physically active for at least 30 minutes every day. Check with your doctor or dietitian before you start any exercise programme. (See pages 82-83 for tips on getting active.)
- Avoid sugary foods, such as fizzy drinks, cakes and sweets, as a high-sugar diet often leads to weight gain.
- Limit processed and fast foods, as they're often high in fat and added sugar, but low in fibre.
- Eat a variety of fruit and vegetables, wholegrains and pulses (beans, peas and lentils).
- Limit the amount of red meat (beef, pork, lamb, venison) you eat. Eat no more than 500g of lean red meat per week.
- Avoid processed meats (sausages, black and white pudding, bacon, ham, corned beef, salami).
- Drink less alcohol. Alcohol is linked to a number of cancers. Limit it to 2 standard drinks for men and 1 for women a day. Have 2-3 days free of alcohol each week. A standard drink is about half a pint of beer or cider, a pub measure of spirits or a small glass of wine.
- Avoid dietary supplements like vitamin pills if you have a balanced diet. Some people may need supplements as advised by their doctor or dietitian.
- Mothers should breastfeed fully for up to 6 months and then add other liquids and foods.
- Don't smoke or chew tobacco in any form.

A balanced diet

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What is a balanced diet?

To have a balanced diet you need to eat a variety of foods that provide the correct amount of nutrients your body needs to grow and work well, such as:

- Protein to help your body to repair itself after illness or treatment and fight infection
- Carbohydrates for energy
- Fats
- Vitamins and minerals to help your body use the foods you eat

They are used by your body to give you energy, repair and build essential tissues, and help with lots of body functions.

Carbohydrates	Fats	Proteins	Vitamins and minerals
Bread	Butter	Meat	Fruit and vegetables
Cereals	Margarine	Chicken	Nuts and seeds
Potatoes	Oil	Fish	Wholegrains
Rice	Full-fat milk	Eggs	Meat and fish
Pasta	Full-fat yogurt	Milk	Pulses (peas, beans, lentils)
Scones	Full-fat cheese	Cheese	Dairy products, such as milk, yogurt and cheese
Crackers	Cream	Yogurt	
Cakes	Eggs	Nuts	
Buns and biscuits	Fromage frais	Pulses (peas, beans, lentils)	
	Nuts		
	Salad dressing		
	Mayonnaise		

Support Line Freephone 1800 200 700

Soya products



You may have heard that it is best to avoid soya during or after treatment. In fact, having 1-2 portions of soya products per day is safe as part of a healthy balanced diet, as they are a good source of protein and are high in soluble fibre, which is good for heart health. Soya foods include tofu, edamame beans, tempeh and soya milk/yogurt.

There is some limited evidence that eating moderate amounts of soya may reduce the risk of breast cancer coming back.

The food pyramid

The food pyramid on pages 80-81 can help you to see how to balance your own diet by getting the right amount of different types of foods. Cancer and cancer treatment can affect your body in different ways. You may need to eat different types of foods or different quantities. You might need special advice from a dietitian to keep a good balance in your diet. Ask to be referred to the dietitian if you have any worries about your diet.

If you have changed the way you eat because of your treatment or how you feel, speak to your dietitian to help you to get a balanced diet again.

Email: supportline@irishcancer.ie

What is a serving?

Serving sizes vary depending on the type of food. 1 serving is:

Meat: A piece about the size of the palm of your hand

Fruit: 1 banana, 2 plums or 6 strawberries

Vegetables: Around half a 200ml disposable plastic cup

Potatoes: 2 medium or 4 small

Pasta or rice: A 200ml disposable plastic cup full

Bread: 2 thin slices

Cheese: A piece the size of 2 thumbs

Milk: One glass

Oil: 1 teaspoon per person when cooking

Spreads: 1 portion pack size

See www.safefood.eu for more



Support Line Freephone 1800 200 700

The Food Pyramid

For adults, teenagers and children aged five and over



Not needed for good health.

Foods and drinks high in fat, sugar and salt

! Most people consume snacks high in fat, sugar and salt and sugar sweetened drinks up to 6 times a day (Healthy Ireland Survey 2016). There are no recommended servings for Top Shelf foods and drinks because they are not needed for good health.



NOT every day

Small or fun-size servings of chocolate, biscuits, cakes, sweets, crisps and other savoury snacks, ice cream and sugary drinks – **not every day, maximum once or twice a week.**

1 serving size is:

In very small amounts

1 portion pack reduced-fat or light spread for 2 slices of bread
1 teaspoon oil per person when cooking

2 Servings a day

50–75g cooked lean beef, lamb, pork, mince or poultry (half size of palm of hand)
100g cooked fish, soya or tofu
¾ cup beans or lentils
2 eggs
40g unsalted nuts or seeds

3 Servings a day

5 for children age 9–12 and teenagers age 13–18
1 glass (200ml) milk
1 carton (125g) yogurt
1 bottle (200ml) yogurt drink
2 thumbs (25g) hard or semi-hard cheese such as cheddar or edam
2 thumbs (25g) soft cheese such as brie or camembert

3-5* Servings a day

Up to 7* for teenage boys and men age 19–50
2 thin slices wholemeal bread, 1½ slices wholemeal soda bread or 1 pitta pocket
½ cup dry porridge oats or ½ cup unsweetened muesli
1 cup flaked type breakfast cereal
1 cup cooked rice, pasta, noodles or cous cous
2 medium or 4 small potatoes, 1 cup yam or plantain

5-7 Servings a day

1 medium sized fruit – apple, orange, pear or banana
2 small fruits – plums, kiwis or mandarin oranges
Small fruits – 6 strawberries, 10 grapes or 16 raspberries
½ cup cooked vegetables – fresh or frozen
1 bowl salad – lettuce, tomato, cucumber
1 bowl/ homemade vegetable soup
150ml unsweetened fruit juice

Fats, spreads and oils

Use as little as possible. Choose mono or polyunsaturated reduced-fat or light spreads. Choose rapeseed, olive, canola, sunflower or corn oils. Limit mayonnaise, coleslaw and salad dressings as they also contain oil. Always cook with as little fat or oil as possible – grilling, oven-baking, steaming, boiling or stir-frying.

Meat, poultry, fish, eggs, beans and nuts

Choose lean meat, poultry (without skin) and fish. Eat oily fish up to twice a week. Choose eggs, beans and nuts. Limit processed salty meats such as sausages, bacon and ham.

Milk, yogurt and cheese

Choose reduced-fat or low-fat varieties. Choose low-fat milk and yogurt more often than cheese. Enjoy cheese in small amounts. Women who are pregnant or breastfeeding need 3 servings a day.

Wholemeal cereals and breads, potatoes, pasta and rice

Wholemeal and wholegrain cereals are best. Enjoy at each meal. The number of servings depends on age, size, if you are a man or a woman and on activity levels. Watch your serving size and use the Daily Servings Guide below.*

Vegetables, salad and fruit

Base your meals on these and enjoy a variety of colours. More is better. Limit fruit juice to unsweetened, once a day.

Needed for good health. Enjoy a variety every day.

*Daily Servings Guide – wholemeal cereals and breads, potatoes, pasta and rice

Active	Child (5–12)	Teenager (13–18)	Adult (19–50)	Adult (51+)	Inactive	Teenager (13–18)	Adult (19–50)	Adult (51+)
	3–4	4	4–5	3–4		3	3–4	3
	3–5	5–7	5–7	4–5		4–5	4–6	4

There is no guideline for inactive children as it is essential that all children are active.

Average daily calorie needs for all foods and drinks for adults

Active 2000kcal Inactive 1800kcal
 Active 2500kcal Inactive 2000kcal

Source: Department of Health, December 2016.

Serving size guide



Cereals, cooked rice and pasta, and vegetables, salad and fruit
Use a 200ml disposable plastic cup to guide serving size.



Cheese
Use two thumbs, width and depth to guide serving size.



Meat, poultry, fish
The palm of the hand, width and depth without fingers and thumbs, shows how much you need in a day.



Reduced-fat spread
Portion packs found in cafes can guide the amount you use. One pack should be enough for two slices of bread.



Oils
Use one teaspoon of oil per person when cooking or in salads.



Drink at least 8 cups of fluid a day – water is best



Get Active!

To maintain a healthy weight adults need at least 30 minutes a day of moderate activity on 5 days a week (or 150 minutes a week); children need to be active at a moderate to vigorous level for at least 60 minutes every day.

Getting active



Taking some exercise is one of the best things you can do to feel as well as possible. It can:

- **Improve fatigue and other side-effects**
- **Increase your energy levels**
- **Help anxiety and depression**
- **Improve your mood and quality of life**
- **Help you to keep a healthy weight**
- **Strengthen your muscles, joints and bones**
- **Help with coordination, balance and stamina**, reducing the risk of frailty and falls
- **Reduce the risk of other health issues**

According to guidelines from the HSE, adults are recommended to get:

At least 2 hours and 30 minutes of **moderate intensity** aerobic physical activity each week

Or

At least 1 hour and 15 minutes of **vigorous intensity** physical activity each week.

Moderate intensity activities include brisk walking and cycling. Moderate intensity should cause you to breathe harder than usual but you should still be able to talk.

Vigorous intensity activities include running and playing a team sport such as Gaelic football or rugby. Vigorous intensity should see you unable to say more than a few words without having to stop to take a breath.

Adults are also advised to do additional muscle-strengthening activities at moderate or greater intensity on 2 or more days a week. Muscle-strengthening activities include lifting weights and climbing stairs.

You are also advised to reduce sedentary activities, such as watching TV, looking at your phone or computer for prolonged periods and driving for prolonged periods.

Talk to your doctor about becoming more physically active. These guidelines are for the general population and may not be suitable for you, depending on your cancer and treatment. Your doctor can advise you on what is safe and suitable for you and may be able to recommend a special exercise programme for people who have had cancer treatment.





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Money matters

- If you have cancer you may not be able to work for a time. You may also have extra expenses.
- You may have to pay for some of your cancer treatment.
- You might be entitled to certain social welfare payments.
- There are services to help you if you're finding it hard to manage.

A diagnosis of cancer often means that you will have extra expenses, such as car parking during hospital visits, medication, travel, heating and childcare costs. If you can't work or you are unemployed, this may cause even more stress. It may be harder for you to deal with cancer if you are worried about money.



Practical and financial advice from the Irish Cancer Society



We provide individualised financial and practical advice for people living with cancer. This includes:

- **Understanding your welfare entitlements**
- **Advice on accessing extra childcare**
- **Telling your boss about your diagnosis**

We can tell you about the public services, community supports and legal entitlements that might help you and your family. We can also act as advocates for patients and their families who may need extra support after a diagnosis. This might include having a Practical and Financial Officer present when discussing your diagnosis with your employer or at meetings with your financial provider to help them understand your diagnosis.

To be referred, call our Support Line on Freephone 1800 200 700 or contact your nearest Daffodil Centre. Our nurses will chat with you and confirm if a discussion with one of our Practical and Financial Officers might help.

Medical expenses

Medical expenses that you might have to pay include:

- Visits to your family doctor (GP)
- Visits to hospital
- Medicines
- Medical aids and equipment (appliances), like wigs

How much you pay towards your medical expenses depends on whether or not you qualify for a medical card and what type of health insurance you have, if any.

If you have a medical card, you will probably have very little to pay for hospital and GP (family doctor) care or your medication. If you are over 70, you can get a free GP visit card.

Medical cards are usually for people on low incomes, but sometimes a card can be given even if your income is above the limit. For example, if you have a large amount of medical expenses. This is known as a discretionary medical card.

An emergency medical card may be issued if you are terminally ill and in palliative care, irrespective of your income.

If you don't have a medical card you will have to pay some of the cost of your care and medication.

If you have health insurance, the insurance company will pay some of the costs, but the amount will depend on your insurance plan. It's important to contact your insurance company before starting tests or treatment to check you're covered.

Benefits and allowances

There are benefits that can help people who are ill and their family. For example, Illness Benefit, Disability Allowance, Invalidity Pension, Carer's Allowance, Carer's Benefit, Carer's Leave.

If you want more information on benefits and allowances, contact:

- **The medical social worker** in the hospital you are attending
- **Citizens Information** – Tel: 0818 074 000
- **Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection** – Tel: 0818 662 244 or ask to speak to a DSP representative at your local health centre or DSP office.

Always have your PPS number to hand when you are asking about entitlements and benefits. It's also a good idea to keep a copy of completed forms, so take a photo or photocopy them before posting.

If you have money problems

If you are getting into debt or you are in debt, the Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) can help you. MABS can look at your situation, work out your budget, help you to deal with your debts and manage your payments. The service is free and confidential. Call the MABS Helpline 0818 07 2000 for information.

If you are finding it hard to cope financially, contact your medical social worker in the hospital or your local health centre for advice. The Irish Cancer Society can also give some help towards travel costs in certain cases. See page 95 for more details of our Transport Service and the Travel2Care fund.

You can also call our Support Line 1800 200 700 or visit a Daffodil Centre and the nurse will suggest ways to help you manage.

Money and finances

Go to www.cancer.ie and see our **Managing money** page for information on:

- Medical costs and help available
- Benefits and allowances that you or your family may qualify for
- Travel services
- Ways to cope with the cost of cancer

Our Benefits Hub on our website has lots of information on government supports for people who are unwell and their carers. It also has advice on how to apply.



Irish Cancer Society services

Our Cancer Support Department provides a range of cancer support services for people with cancer, at home and in hospital, including:

- Support Line
- Daffodil Centres
- Telephone Interpreting Service
- Peer Support
- Patient Education
- Counselling
- Support in your area
- Transport Service
- Night Nursing
- Publications and website information
- Practical and financial solutions (see page 88)

Support Line Freephone 1800 200 700

Call our Support Line and speak to one of our cancer nurses for confidential advice, support and information for anyone affected by cancer. Our Support Line is open Monday to Friday, 9am–5pm or visit our Online Community at www.cancer.ie/community

The Support Line also offers video calls for those who want a face-to-face chat with one of our cancer nurses. From the comfort of your own home, you can meet a cancer nurse online and receive confidential advice, support and information on any aspect of cancer.

Our cancer nurses are available Monday to Friday to take video calls on the Microsoft Teams platform. To avail of the service <https://www.cancer.ie/Support-Line-Video-Form>

One of our nursing team will then email you with the time for your video call. The email will also have instructions on how to use Microsoft Teams on your phone, tablet or computer.



Daffodil Centres

Visit our Daffodil Centres, located in 13 hospitals nationwide. The centres are staffed by cancer nurses and trained volunteers who provide face-to-face advice, support and information to anyone affected by cancer.

The service is free and confidential.

This is a walk-in service; you do not need an appointment. For the opening hours and contact details of your nearest Daffodil Centre, go to www.cancer.ie and search 'Daffodil Centres'.



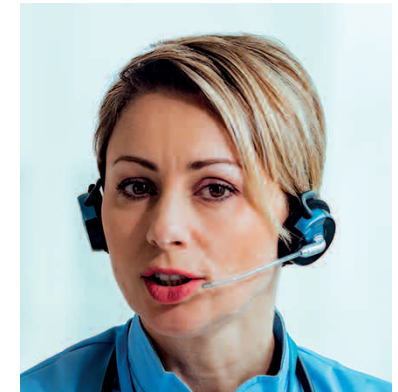
Who can use the Daffodil Centres?

Daffodil Centres are open to everyone – you don't need an appointment. Just call in if you want to talk or need information on any aspect of cancer including:

- Cancer treatments and side-effects
- Chemotherapy group education sessions
- Emotional support
- Practical entitlements and services
- Living with and beyond cancer
- End-of-life services
- Lifestyle and cancer prevention
- Local cancer support groups and centres

Telephone Interpreting Service

We make every effort to ensure that you can speak to our Support Line and Daffodil Centre nurses in your own language through our Telephone Interpreting Service.



If you would like to speak to us using the Telephone Interpreting Service, call our Support Line on Freephone 1800 200 700, Monday to Friday 9am-5pm, or contact your nearest Daffodil Centre.

- Tell us, in English, the language you would like.
- You will be put on hold while we connect with an interpreter. You may be on hold for a few minutes. Don't worry, we will come back to you.
- We will connect you to an interpreter.
- The interpreter will help you to speak to us in your own language.

Peer Support

Peer Support is a free and confidential telephone service connecting people with similar cancer experiences. Peer Support volunteers are fully trained to provide emotional and practical cancer support in a safe, responsible and kind way.

To be referred to a Peer Support volunteer, call Freephone 1800 200 700 or contact your nearest Daffodil Centre. For more information on Peer Support, search 'peer support' at www.cancer.ie

Support Line Freephone 1800 200 700

Patient Education

At our free education workshops, our cancer nurses provide tailored information before and after cancer treatment.

The workshops take place in person, in one of our 13 Daffodil Centres nationwide, or online. To register for a place at one of our Patient Education Workshops, call our Support Line on 11800 200 700, contact your nearest Daffodil Centre or email patienteducation@irishcancer.ie



Counselling

The Society funds professional one-to-one counselling for those who have been affected by a cancer diagnosis. Counselling is available for the person who has been diagnosed, family members and close friends. The services we provide are:

- **Remote counselling nationwide**, by telephone or video call.
- **In-person counselling sessions in cancer support centres** around the country.

For more information, call our Support Line on Freephone 1800 200 700 or contact your nearest Daffodil Centre.

Support in your area

We work with local cancer support centres and the National Cancer Control Programme (NCCP) to ensure cancer patients and their families have access to high-quality, confidential support in a location that's convenient to them.

For more information about what's available near you, visit www.cancer.ie/local-support, call our Support Line on Freephone 1800 200 700 or contact your nearest Daffodil Centre.

Transport service

The Society funds transport and financial grants for patients in need who are in cancer treatment.

- Transport is available to patients having chemotherapy treatments in our partner hospitals who are having difficulty getting to and from their local appointments.
- We have recently opened a pilot service for patients having radiotherapy treatment at University Hospital Cork and Bons Secours Hospital, Cork.
- **Travel2Care** is a fund for patients who are having difficulty getting to and from appointments for diagnostic tests or cancer treatments. Patients can apply for this fund if they are travelling over 50 kilometres one way to a national designated cancer centre or satellite centre. Travel2Care is made available by the National Cancer Control Programme.

To access any of these supports, please contact your hospital healthcare professional, Freephone 1800 200 700 or contact your nearest Daffodil Centre.

Night Nursing

We provide end-of-life care for cancer patients in their own homes. We offer up to 10 nights of care for each patient. Our service allows patients to remain at home for the last days of their lives surrounded by their families and loved ones. This is a unique service in Ireland, providing night-time palliative nursing care to cancer patients, mostly between 11pm and 7am.

For more information, please contact the healthcare professional looking after your loved one.

“ We were really lost when we brought Mammy home from the hospital and the night nurse's support was invaluable. She provided such practical and emotional support. ”

“ Our night nurse was so caring and yet totally professional. We are so grateful to her for being there for Dad and for us. ”

Publications and website information

We provide information on a range of topics, including cancer types, treatments and side-effects and coping with cancer. Visit our website www.cancer.ie to see our full range of information and download copies. You can also Freephone our Support Line or call into your nearest Daffodil Centre for a free copy of any of our publications.

To find out more about the Irish Cancer Society's services and programmes:

- Visit us at www.cancer.ie
- Call our Support Line on Freephone 1800 200 700
- Email our Support Line at supportline@irishcancer.ie
- Contact your nearest Daffodil Centre
- Follow us on:
 - Facebook
 - X
 - Instagram
 - LinkedIn



Local cancer support services

The Irish Cancer Society works with cancer support services all over Ireland. They have a range of services for cancer patients, their partners, families and carers, during and after treatment, many of which are free. For example:

- **Professional counselling.** The Irish Cancer Society funds free one-to-one counselling remotely and through many local support services
- **Support groups,** often led by professionals like social workers, counsellors, psychologists or cancer nurses
- **Special exercise programmes**
- **Stress management and relaxation techniques,** such as mindfulness and meditation
- **Complementary therapies** like massage, reflexology and acupuncture
- **Specialist services** such as prosthesis or wig fitting and lymphoedema services, such as education, exercise, self-management and manual lymph drainage
- **Mind and body sessions,** for example, yoga and tai chi
- **Expressive therapies** such as creative writing and art
- **Free Irish Cancer Society publications** and other high-quality, trustworthy information on a range of topics

Cancer support services usually have a drop-in service where you can call in for a cup of tea and find out what's available.

You can call our Support Line on Freephone 1800 200 700 to find your nearest cancer support centre. Or go to www.cancer.ie and search 'Find support'.



What does that word mean?

Alternative therapy: Something used instead of conventional medicine. For example herbalism, metabolic therapy, megavitamin therapy.

Anorexia: Loss of appetite, lack of desire or interest in food.

Antioxidants: Chemicals that protect your body from other chemicals called free radicals that cause cell damage. Antioxidants are vitamins, enzymes and minerals. They are found in berries, broccoli, tomatoes, red grapes, garlic, spinach, tea and carrots. Some well-known antioxidants are vitamin A, vitamin C and vitamin E. See also free radicals.

Calorie: This measures the energy your body gets from food. You need calories so your body has the energy to work, grow and repair itself.

Cachexia: When there is severe loss of appetite, weight loss, loss of strength and muscle mass due to cancer and/or its treatment.

Complementary: Therapies and treatments that you can have along with your standard medical treatment to try and feel better. For example, massage and acupuncture.

Chemotherapy: A treatment that uses drugs to cure or control cancer.

Dehydration: When your body loses too much water, affecting how it works.

Digestive tract: The parts of your body involved with eating, digesting and getting rid of food. This includes the mouth, gullet (oesophagus), stomach and intestines.

Diet: The foods you eat and drink. This includes liquids and solids.

Dietitian: An expert on food and nutrition. They can give advice on the most suitable type of diet to follow when you have cancer.

Fibre: The part of plant foods that your body cannot digest. It helps to move waste out of your bowels quickly.

Fluids: Things to drink, like water. Also called liquids.

Free radicals: Chemicals that are highly reactive and often contain oxygen or nitrogen. They are formed naturally in your body during chemical reactions.

Herbalism: A form of alternative medicine that uses plants and simple extracts of plants to treat different conditions.

Hormone therapy: A treatment that changes the amount of hormones in your body to cure or prevent cancer coming back.

Malnourished: When you do not take in enough energy, protein and other nutrients, you will lose weight and your body may not work as well as it should. This can happen if you do not eat a balanced diet. Undereating or overeating can lead to a lack of a balanced diet.

Minerals: Nutrients needed by your body to help it work well. These include iron, calcium, potassium and sodium.

Natural products: Products that occur in nature. This does not mean that they are safe.

Nutrients: Chemicals that make up foods. These include protein, fat, carbohydrate, vitamins and minerals. They are used by your body to work properly and grow. Essential nutrients are those that your body does not make itself and must get from food eaten.

Nutrition: The taking in and use of food by your body. After food is eaten, the body breaks it down into nutrients, which then travel through the bloodstream to cells in your body to help it grow and work.

Obesity: Having a high amount of body fat. A person is said to be obese if they have a body mass index (BMI) greater than 30.

Radiotherapy: A treatment that uses high-energy X-rays to cure or control cancer and other diseases.

Targeted therapies: A treatment to help your immune system fight disease and infection. It uses proteins from your body to destroy cancer cells.

Soft diet: Food that is softened by cooking, mashing, blending or puréeing.

Tube feeding: A small tube that is placed in your nose and down into your stomach or directly into your stomach or bowel. It can give you liquid nutrients.

Vitamins: Nutrients which your body needs to grow and stay strong. For example, vitamins A, B, C, D, E, K.

Join the Irish Cancer Society team

If you want to make a difference to people affected by cancer, join our team!

Support people affected by cancer

Reaching out directly to people with cancer is one of the most rewarding ways to help:

- Help people needing lifts to hospital by becoming a volunteer driver
- Give one-on-one support to someone newly diagnosed with cancer as part of our Peer Support programme
- Give information and support to people concerned about or affected by cancer at one of our hospital-based Daffodil Centres

Share your experiences

Use your voice to bring reassurance to cancer patients and their families, help people to connect with our services or inspire them to get involved as a volunteer:

- Share your cancer story
- Tell people about our services
- Describe what it's like to organise or take part in a fundraising event

Raise money

All our services are funded by the public's generosity:

- Donate direct
- Take part in one of our fundraising events or challenges
- Organise your own event

Contact our Support Line on Freephone 1800 200 700 if you want to get involved!

Did you like this booklet?

We would love to hear your comments or suggestions. Please email reviewers@irishcancer.ie



Our cancer nurses are here for you:

- Support Line Freephone **1800 200 700**
- Email **supportline@irishcancer.ie**
- Contact your nearest Daffodil Centre