

# Eating, appetite and taste

During cancer treatment, you may lose your appetite. This may be because you feel sick or tired, or because food and drink taste different. You may no longer enjoy certain foods. Or you may find that all foods taste the same. Food may taste very sweet or salty. Or you may have a metallic taste in your mouth.

## Tips for managing appetite and taste changes

- Instead of 3 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. Nuts, crisps, dried fruit or cheese and crackers are quite light and tasty. Or try a yoghurt, peanut butter or fromage frais.
- Try to make your food look as attractive as possible. Garnish food with lemon, tomato or parsley. Put small portions on your plate. Or use a small plate to serve food on.
- Eat your meals slowly and chew the food well. Relax for a little while after each meal.
- Drinking a small amount of alcohol just before you eat, or with food, may help to stimulate your appetite. Check with your doctor that you can have alcohol.
- Have sweet or savoury nourishing drinks as well as small meals. These can be sipped slowly throughout the day.
- Sometimes the smell of cooking can be enjoyable. But it may put you off eating. 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. On good days, eat well, and treat 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.
- Use seasonings, spices and herbs to flavour your cooking. But if your mouth is sore, you may find some spices and seasonings make it worse.
- When cooking, use strong sauces such as curry or sweet and sour. Sharp-tasting foods such as fresh fruit, fruit juices and sugar-free sour or boiled sweets can be refreshing and leave a pleasant taste in your mouth. But be careful if your mouth is sore, as these may feel painful to eat.
- If you no longer like tea or coffee, try lemon tea or a cold drink.
- 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 let your food cool before eating it.
- Cold meats may taste better served with pickle or chutney.
- Use re-usable plastic cutlery if you notice a metallic taste in your mouth.

## Macmillan Cancer Support resources

We have more information on our [website](#), including audiobooks. Or you can order our free booklets and leaflets on [be.macmillan.org.uk](http://be.macmillan.org.uk) such as:

- [Eating problems and cancer](#)
- [Healthy eating and cancer](#)
- [The building-up diet](#)
- [Stay healthy – eat a healthy diet – easy read](#)

We produce information in a [range of formats](#) and [languages](#). To order these, visit our website or call our support line.

## Further Macmillan support

If you have more questions or would like to talk to someone, call the Macmillan Support Line free on **0808 808 00 00**, 7 days a week, 8am to 8pm. Or visit [macmillan.org.uk](http://macmillan.org.uk) where you can chat to us [online](#).

Deaf or hard of hearing? Call using NGT (Text Relay) on **18001 0808 808 00 00**, or use the NGT Lite app. Speak another language? Telephone interpreters are available. Please tell us in English the language you would like to use.

Or if you want to share your experiences or ask questions, you can find others who understand on our [Online Community](#).

## Other useful contact details

- British Dietetic Association (BDA) – visit [www.bda.uk.com](http://www.bda.uk.com)
- Diabetes UK Helpline – visit [www.diabetes.org.uk](http://www.diabetes.org.uk)
- Guts UK – visit [www.gutscharity.org.uk](http://www.gutscharity.org.uk)

## Notes and questions

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