



Poor Appetite

Loss of appetite is a very common side effect of chemotherapy, radiation, and cancer itself. Other side effects of treatments such as loss of taste and smell, fatigue, nausea, and stress may lead to decreased appetite.

It is very important to try to eat well during treatment. Your body needs calories and protein to help keep your weight and energy up. Maintaining strength can make your treatments easier to tolerate also.

What to do if you have a poor appetite:

- Eat small meals more often. Try to eat something every 2-3 hours.
- Have meals that are easy to prepare such as casseroles and ready-to-eat items.
- Have snacks on hand and close by during the day such as muffins, peanut butter and crackers, granola bars, ice cream, pudding, raisins, nuts, and fruit.
- Make eating enjoyable! Light some candles, play relaxing music, use the nice dishes, or visit with friends during meals.
- Avoid drinking liquids with meals unless they are needed for dry mouth or other swallowing problems.
- Increase activity. Taking a walk in the fresh air can help improve appetite.
- Use seasonings to enhance flavor if tolerated.
- Have items that are room temperature or cold to reduce the smell of foods.
- If you do not feel like you can eat foods, consider sipping on nutritional supplements throughout the day. Also try soups, juices, and other liquids.
- Try to eat larger meals when you feel the best. Often people feel better earlier in the day or after a nap when they are rested.
- Make every bite count by choosing items high in calories and protein.

Contact your local VA dietitian for more information.

