

Nutrition During Cancer

A Guide for Patients/Families



Department of Nutrition and Food Services




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A healthy diet is especially important for people with cancer. Diet is an important part of your treatment for cancer. A nutritious diet is always vital for your body to work at its best.

Eating a balanced diet can help:

- Make you feel better;
- Improve your nutritional status;
- Reduce treatment side effects;
- Decrease the risk of infection;
- You heal and recover faster

Nutritional needs of people with cancer are different for each person. Your health care team includes the nutritionist/dietician who can tell you what and how much your nutritional requirements.

What is the Neutropenia Diet?

The Neutropenia diet is recommended for patients who have undergone treatment, are on high dose chemotherapy, Bone marrow transplant or radiotherapy; or those who have suppressed immune systems, as they are more likely to develop an infection.

Following are some features to remember:

- Cook all meat, poultry and fish thoroughly, avoid raw eggs and raw fish:
- Thaw food in refrigerator, not at room temperature and cook immediately:
- Avoid old, mouldy and damaged fruits, vegetables and nuts:
- Check expiry out, avoid salad bars and buffets:
- Wash hands frequently:
- Keep hot food hot and cold food cold:
- Avoid food items which have been left uncovered for a long time.



Managing Eating Problems During Treatment

When cancer is diagnosed, your healthcare team will talk to you about a treatment plan. This may involve surgery, radiation therapy, chemotherapy, hormone therapy, immunotherapy or a combination of treatments. It is important to try eat, in spite of the side effects of treatment. Here are some ideas to help you manage some common side effects.

Nausea:

- Eat small, frequent meals every few hours;
- Eat dry food such as crackers, bread sticks or toast frequently throughout the day;
- Sit up for one hour after eating;
- Eat soft, bland and easy digest food rather than heavy meals.
- Avoid fried, greasy and rich food;
- Suck ice cubes, hard candy and peppermints if there is a bad taste in your mouth;
- Frequent eating and slowly sipping fluids may help;
- Do not force yourself to eat when you feel nauseated.

Anorexia (Loss of Appetite):

- Eat small and frequent high-calorie meals;
Add extra calories and protein to food; e.g. fruits shakes, Ice cream, pudding.
- Take snacks between meals;
- Experiment with different food items;
- Choose high calorie food, such as pudding, creams soups, and cereals like porridge or oats.



Diarrhea:

Diarrhea may be due to many causes, you may get it because of chemotherapy, radiation therapy to the lower abdomen and of antibiotics.

If you have diarrhea:

- Reduce dietary fibre like fruits, vegetables, wholegrain;
- Avoid milk and its products except yogurt;
- Drink plenty of fluids at room temperature;
- Try soft with high potassium food items like bananas, potatoes, Juices.

Constipation:

- Eat more fibre-containing food on a regular basis like fruits, vegetables, lentil, whole wheat flour and its products;
- Drink 8-10 cups of fluids a day.

Dry Mouth:

- Keep water handy to moisten the mouth at all times;
- Avoid liquids and food with high sugar content;
- Consume very sweet or tangy food and beverages to stimulate saliva;
- Use a straw to drink liquids;
- Eat moist food with extra sauces, gravy, frozen desserts, ice lollies.
- Oral care is very important. Brush your teeth and gums at least four times a day (before and after each meal).



Chewing and swallowing difficulties:

If you swallowing difficulties are minor, the following steps may help:

- Eat soft items and grind food so that less chewing is required;
- Liquidised food can be taken with high calorie liquids like shakes, juices;
- Eat frequent small meals and snacks to ensure that you are getting enough calories;
- Choose soft food items or items that can be cooled until tender such as mashed potatoes.
- Liquidize food if necessary.

Taste Variation:

- Eat small frequent meals and healthy snacks;
- Eat whenever you feel hungry rather than at set times;
- Use plastic utensils if food tastes metallic;
- Add additional spices or flavour to food;
- Citrus fruits and tangy items help in reducing the bitter taste in mouth;
- Rinse mouth frequently.

Avoid food containing phenol. This includes all smoked food items like smoked chicken, smoked fish, smoked vegetables etc.

After Completion of treatment

Once you are stable after the initial diagnosis and treatment, adopt moderation and variety as the keys to a healthy diet and lifestyle. Enjoy food and be active.

Consult your physician and nutritionist as they are your best sources of information about your diet. The information in this booklet will add to their advice

Important note:

Food provided during hospitalization to patients is disease specific and during stay food from outside hospital is not permitted. Written and verbal instruction related to dietary restrictions is explained by clinical nutrition staff, where applicable.

Outpatient Nutrition Care Clinics

Nazarall Walji Building (NW 2)

Phone: (021) 3486-5789, 3486-5790

Manday to Thursday

Timings: Morning 9:00am - 11:00am

Consulting Clinic (CC4)

Phone: (021) 3486-1034

Friday

Timings Evening 2:00pm - 4:00pm

Sports & Rehabilitation Clinic (Sports Centre)

Phone: (021) 3486-1662

Tuesday

Timing: Morning 9:00am - 11:00am

Cardiac Clinic (NWI)

Phone: (021) 3486-5781/82

Monday - Thursday

Timing: Evening 2:00pm - 4:00pm

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