



## Head & Neck Nutrition Information

Head and neck (HN) cancers involve the mouth, sinuses, and throat. Treatment usually involves one or a combination of surgery, radiation, or chemotherapy. Because of the location of the disease, and the treatment, all HN patients will have challenges with eating at some point.

**WHY NUTRITION MATTERS:** When you eat and drink enough to maintain your weight you will feel better, have fewer severe side effects, fewer treatment delays, and recover quicker. Even if you're overweight, it's important not to lose weight quickly.

**BEFORE TREATMENT:** Start thinking about your eating before you start treatment. Your goal: to eat as healthy as you can, and to maintain your weight. Choose high calorie, nourishing foods and eat more often: 3 – 6 times a day. Swallowing or chewing problems? Switch to soft foods and add nutrition supplements or smoothies to your day.

**DURING TREATMENT:** You will need more calories than usual as treatment progresses. Choose soft foods, and liquids when your regular diet is too hard to swallow or chew.

High calorie supplements or smoothies can replace some or all your food. You need calories AND protein, so choose a drink that provides both. Adults need 5 – 9 cartons a day of most supplements if they aren't eating or drinking anything else. Choose high calorie, nutritious liquids like bean soups, smoothies, shakes, and milk.

Sip on water or other liquids throughout the day. Have 6 – 8 cups daily, at least.

Keep swallowing throughout your treatment! Your doctor may also refer you to a Speech Therapist who specializes in Swallow Therapy.

**MOUTH CARE:** Use a baking soda and water "swish and spit" throughout the day to keep your mouth clean, moist, and reduce mouth sores.

**AFTER TREATMENT:** You may need more calories and nutrition for months after treatment. Your body is healing. Now is not the time to stop eating and drinking.

**NUTRITION SUPPORT:** There are times when some people can't eat by mouth due to swallowing or other issues. A feeding tube (also called a gastrostomy, or G-tube, or PEG tube) helps people get through treatment by helping them stay hydrated, lose less weight, feel better, and recover more rapidly. If you need a feeding tube, we will let you know. Your dietitian will teach you to use the tube and help you get supplies. With a feeding tube, you can still eat and drink by mouth if able. Once people are eating 100% by mouth, the tubes are removed. This is usually a couple of months after treatment.

**Nutrition questions or concerns? Call your Oncology Dietitian at 901-683-0055 Ext 61250**