



What to Eat During and After Treatment

Eating good food helps you feel better, maintain your energy level, and heal faster during and after treatment. Additionally, a well-nourished body tolerates treatment better. Your goal is to eat the best diet you can during this time.

What is the best diet to follow during treatment?

Vegetables, fruits, whole grains, legumes, lean protein, and good fats provide your body with nutrients needed for healing and fighting cancer. This is a plant-based diet. Your goals are:

- to maintain your weight
- to avoid losing or gaining weight (if you are at a good weight)
- to nourish your body.

A healthy diet helps keep your body strong so you can finish all treatments without delays. Try to eat regular meals at least 3 times a day. You may prefer smaller, more frequent meals 4 to 6 times daily.

Do I need extra protein?

You need enough protein for healthy cells to grow and to support your body. Poultry, fish, lean meat, low fat dairy, eggs, beans and peas, soy, and peanut butter are high in protein. Have a high protein food at each meal. Think you need more protein? See your Registered Dietitian Nutritionist (RDN) for suggestions to increase your intake.

What are good fats?

Plant oils, nuts, seeds, olives, and avocados contain good fats. Mayonnaise and salad dressings are often made with plant oils, which are good for you too.

Can I eat sugar?

Yes, but not much. Sugar brings nothing healthful to your body. Choose whole grains, fruits, legumes, vegetables, fat free milk (all good carbohydrates) to give your body the nutrients it needs to stay strong, fight cancer and heal.

What about raw produce?

Unless your doctor tells you to avoid it, raw/uncooked produce is fine. Wash all fruits and vegetables, even those with rinds like melons or citrus fruits. Peel any that are waxed. Avoid imported produce. Do not eat raw meat or eggs, soft cheeses (ex: Brie, bleu cheese, feta) or unpasteurized juice or raw milk. Avoid salad bars. Follow safe food handling instructions.

Are there foods I need to avoid?

In general, avoid too many fried foods, too many sweets and sweetened drinks. Your doctor or nurse will tell you if you need to avoid anything else.

What if I can only eat junk food?

Eat what you can tolerate and what appeals to you. Try to eat healthful foods whenever possible.

How much water do I need to drink?

Start with six to eight (8 oz.) glasses. Your nurse will tell you if you need to drink more. Water is best, but all liquids contribute to your fluid intake - juice, milk, tea, etc. If you are used to having one to two cups of coffee or tea each day, you can continue, unless told otherwise.

What if I get side effects such as diarrhea, constipation, indigestion, nausea?

These affect your food intake and health. Usually, medicine is the first line of defense, followed by diet changes. You usually don't have to change your diet unless/until you get a side effect. (Some people have no nutrition related side effects.) The RDN can help if you experience any nutrition related side effect. Always let your health care provider know if you have any side effect.

Will I lose weight? Will I gain weight?

Both are common. Unintended weight loss is not good- even if you need or want to lose weight. It leads to muscle loss which lowers your immune system and saps your energy.

To stop unwanted weight loss, eat what you can, and choose healthful foods as much as possible. Small, frequent meals help (eat 4-6 times a day). Good, high calorie food choices include nuts, nut butters, dried fruits, and smoothies. Easy to digest foods like mashed sweet or white potatoes with butter, regular pastas and rice with cheese, and nutritious soups can also help. Sometimes liquids are tolerated better. Nutrition supplements can help.

Weight gain is also common during treatment. To avoid adding unwanted extra pounds, pay attention to what you eat. Choose healthful foods when you can, don't overeat, and stay active. Talk with your doctor or dietitian about the best timing for appropriate weight loss for you.

Weight loss or unwanted weight gain may not be a good idea during treatment. Aim to eat foods that nourish your body without changing your weight.

Should I take any supplements?

A basic multivitamin/mineral supplement is usually fine but not generally recommended. Avoid high doses of vitamins as they may interfere with your treatment. Talk with the RDN or your doctor if you have questions.

Should I eat a special diet on treatment days?

Not really. It's a good idea to eat at least a light meal before coming to the clinic and to avoid an empty stomach in general.

Can I eat in the clinic while I get my treatment?

Yes. Bring a lunch or snacks and drinks to nibble on throughout the day. Pack foods that don't need refrigeration or bring a cooler. You can also have someone go out and pick up some food if you get hungry.

Finally, look at food as the best way to bring cancer fighting nutrients into your body and as the main source of energy for your body throughout treatment. Eating healthful foods, staying hydrated and maintaining your weight help you tolerate treatment better, and recover quicker. Food and eating can continue to be an enjoyable time with family and friends. Simple, healthful meals that taste good and are good for you are just what the dietitian ordered!

Questions? Want more information? Ask to speak to a Registered Dietitian Nutritionist, for more information on nutrition and cancer at 901-683-005, ext. 61250

Other resources: The American Institute of Cancer Research (aicr.org) and oncologynutrition.org.