

Loss of Appetite

Sometimes we can lose our appetite or interest in eating. Reasons include sickness, medical treatments, medicines, anxiety, tiredness, pain, or depression.

While you may not feel hungry, it is still important to eat. This will help maintain your nutrition and strength. Think of food as a fuel for your body or as a medicine as part of your treatment.

This information will help you to get enough nutrition even when you aren't feeling hungry.

Tips to improve eating when your appetite is poor:

- Have 6 smaller meals/snacks across the day instead of 3 larger meals.
- Don't wait until you feel hungry. Try to eat by the clock i.e., every 2 hours.
- Try not to skip meals, as not eating can make you feel more unwell.
- Plan larger meals for times when your appetite is a little better. Have small snacks at other times when you don't feel as hungry.
- Eat favourite foods at any time of the day, e.g., breakfast foods at dinner.
- Enjoy meals with family and friends where possible.
- Think about how you are serving food. It can help if you make your food look attractive on the plate.
- You may find softer foods that need less chewing easier to eat.
- Ensure your mouth feels fresh and clean before eating.
- Cook larger servings of meals and store as single serves in the freezer. Good options are casseroles, soups, pastas, and baked desserts.
- Try drinking fluids between meals, as fluids with meals can fill you up.

- Make the most of every mouthful. Add high energy and high protein foods to meals and snacks. Examples include cream, butter, milk or milk powder, cheese oil, or creamy sauces. For more information, please see High Protein High Energy handout https://www.health.qld.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0021/145830/nemo-hphe.pdf
- Try new foods. Different colours, flavours, smells and textures may increase your interest in food. You can add herbs, nuts and seeds or sauces to give extra flavour or texture.
- Have ready-prepared meals and snacks on hand for times when you don't feel like preparing food. Good options are soups, frozen meals, nuts, dairy desserts, cheese, crackers, and dip.
- Plan your day and take snacks with you if you are out. Allow family and friends to assist with food shopping and cooking.
- Serve food on a small plate as a large full plate may be overwhelming. You can always have seconds!
- If you don't feel like eating, have a nourishing drink high in energy and protein. Try milk, milkshakes, smoothies, or supplements such as 'Sustagen' or 'Ensure'. Choose these drinks over water, tea and coffee.
- Gentle physical activity can stimulate appetite. Try taking a short walk around your house or the block.
- If pain or nausea is causing your loss of appetite, talk to your doctor. Medicines are often helpful

Take home messages:

- Eating is important to maintain your nutrition and strength, even if you don't feel hungry.
- Plan 5-6 small meals each day. Choose foods and drinks that are higher in energy and protein. Eat to the clock rather than relying on your appetite.
- Ask to see a dietitian if you are struggling to eat enough or losing weight without trying