Changes in Appetite

Changes in appetite are common with cancer. People with poor appetite or appetite loss may eat less than usual, not feel hungry at all, or feel full (satiated) after eating only a small amount. Appetite can come and go, so the way you are feeling may be temporary. Try to take advantage of times when food tastes good and eat to your maximum potential. Ongoing appetite loss can lead to weight loss, malnutrition, and loss of muscle mass and strength. Other reasons for a reduced appetite include:

- Early satiety from ascites (accumulation of fluid in the abdomen)
- Chemotherapy/Immunotherapy
- Sedative medications (drugs that cause feelings of calm or sleepiness)
- Changes in metabolism

Tips to Increase your Food Intake

- Eat 6 small meals throughout the day instead of 3 larger meals.
- When eating a meal, eat high-protein foods first, when your appetite is strongest. Some examples of high-protein foods are beans, tofu, chicken, fish, eggs, cheese, meat and nuts.
- Eat the most when you are hungriest. If you are very hungry at breakfast or lunch, make that your largest meal of the day, even if you would typically eat a smaller meal at that time.
- Drink beverages between meals instead of with meals. Drinking a beverage while you eat can make you feel full, faster.
- Sip on higher-calorie beverages during the day such as juice, nectar, milk or a fruit and yogurt smoothie. Ask your dietitian for some recipes.
- Add protein and calories to favorite foods. For example, add powdered milk to oatmeal and diced meat to soups.
- Try to eat in pleasant surroundings and eat meals with family or friends.
- Go for a walk before mealtime to stimulate your appetite.
- Eat foods you really like during periods when you aren’t very hungry.
- It may help you to eat by the clock. Set the clock for every 2-4 hours and eat a small snack even if you are not feeling hungry.
- Keep snacks handy for nibbling. Make it easy to snack at any time. Easy snack ideas include peanut butter and crackers, low fat granola, dried fruit or crackers with cheese.
- Weigh yourself every 3 to 4 days to make sure your weight remains stable.
Dealing with Mealtime

- Increase or decrease the seasonings and flavorings of your food to accommodate any taste changes you may be experiencing.

- Try to make mealtime enjoyable with an attractive setting and colorful food.

- Drink a glass of wine or beer before meals. This often stimulates appetite. **Check with your physician to make sure a small amount of alcohol is okay.**

- Try changing the time, place and surroundings of meals. Eat with others or watch your favorite TV program while you eat.

- Create a mealtime atmosphere that is relaxed, non-stressed, and unhurried.

- If this is a time when you really do not enjoy eating, you may want to concentrate on eating and drinking just for the nutritional value of the food.

Sample Meal Plan:

**Breakfast:**
- 1 cup oatmeal or cream of wheat with
- ¼ cup chopped raisins or dates
- 6-8 oz soy milk

**Snack:**
- 1 piece of fruit
- Slice of bread/toast with peanut butter or
- 1 can Boost

**Lunch:**
- Sandwich or chili with beans
- Corn muffin or low sodium soup with crackers
- 6-8oz soy milk

**Snack:**
- Cheese and crackers
- 1 can Boost

**Dinner:**
- Chicken breast
- Mashed potato w/ gravy
- Steamed broccoli w/ cauliflower w/ melted cheese

**Snack:**
- Pudding
- Graham crackers