

Eating well



Maintaining a healthy level of nutrition is always important but is something that is vital if you have a blood cancer. Once you start to undergo treatments like chemotherapy, ensuring you are giving your body the right nutrients can help you tolerate treatment better. Good nutrition will also help your body to fight infection when it is at its weakest and will also help you to recover more quickly.

What is good nutrition?

It is important to ensure that you are eating the right amounts of food from the different food groups;

- Fruit and vegetables – five or more servings a day
- Breads and cereals – six or more servings a day
- Milk and milk products – two servings a day
- Lean meat, chicken, fish, eggs, legumes and nuts – at least one serving a day

Fluid

During treatment it is extremely important to keep your fluid levels up. You should aim for 30mls per kg of body weight. For example: a person weighing 70kg will need 30mls x 70kgs = 2100mls daily. If you are undergoing radiotherapy your fluid requirements are increased, therefore you need to be sure you are drinking even more than usual.

Water is of course the best fluid to drink however it can be a bit boring when you need to drink a lot. Try making sure at least half your daily intake is water and the rest can be made up of other drinks such as diluted fruit juice, Milo/tea or nutritional supplement drinks such as Complan or Fortisip.

Nausea and vomiting

Another common symptom of treatment is nausea and vomiting. There are numerous things that you can do to try and make this side effect more bearable;

- Increase your intake of bland carbohydrate foods such as crackers, bread, rice and cereal. These are all very easy to digest and usually well tolerated.
- Avoid skipping meals as hunger can bring on nausea and could make you feel worse.
- Avoid fatty or spicy foods and try having small amounts of salty or sour foods as your body may not be getting enough salt if you have been vomiting a lot.



Weight loss/gain

Weight loss is a very common problem during treatment. Although it is less common, some patients may also gain weight. Some common reasons behind these side effects could be:

- Treatment side effects – sometimes chemotherapy can put you off eating. Certain treatments and medications may also make you put on weight.
- Sensory changes – you may find that your perception of taste and smell changes. Your once favourite meal may not be something you can now stomach.
- Emotional stress and anxiety – when we are stressed our body uses up more energy so we need to be eating more to compensate for this. However, the emotional stress of treatment may mean you are eating less than usual. You may also find that when you can eat, you are emotionally eating foods you may not usually choose and you can gain weight.

Sore or dry mouth

A sore or dry mouth is a very common side effect of treatment. During this time it is extremely important to have good oral hygiene and mouth care. There are many things you can do to try and alleviate this side effect such as:

- Rinse your mouth with baking soda and water several times a day.
- Avoid rough, dry or hard foods.
- Rinse your mouth with water after eating.
- Sip on fluid regularly or suck on ice cubes.

What can you do?

- When you feel like you have the energy, try and prepare meals and even freeze them to have on the days where you may not feel as well.
- Split your meals up frequently throughout the day into smaller amounts. This way you will still get the nutrients that you need but it may not be as hard to tackle all at once.
- In-between meals you can also ensure you are getting enough nutrition by drinking high calorie drinks such as homemade smoothies.



For more information please contact Support Services on supportservices@leukaemia.org.nz or 0800 15 10 15

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