

# Diet during cancer



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# Introduction

You may have problems eating and drinking during or after the treatment. A good diet and a stable body weight are important, especially if you are sick. It sometimes helps to endure and recover from a treatment. A good diet is also good for your resistance and condition.

A good diet contains:

- Enough energy.
- Enough protein.
- Enough fluids.
- Vitamins and minerals.

Diet cannot cure cancer, but it can support treatment.

## Energy

If you eat less than you need, you will lose weight. If you have lost a lot of weight in a short time, it is important to pay extra attention to your diet. Weight loss before or during a treatment is not good for your fitness. Your recovery may also take longer.

Weigh yourself regularly, for example once a week. Do this as much as possible on the same scales and under the same conditions. For example, always in the morning after going to the toilet and before getting dressed. Small differences in weight are quite normal. A stable weight indicates that you are getting enough calories. Try to maintain your weight. If necessary, consume extra snacks and high-calorie products.



If you eat more or move less, then you may gain weight. Even if you are on the heavy side, it is best to try to maintain your weight. Losing weight is better at a different point in time.

## Protein

You need protein for your body's recovery after a treatment. For example, after major surgery or radiation. Protein-rich foods are:

- Eggs.
- Cheese.
- Chicken.
- Milk and dairy products.
- Vegetarian meat substitutes.
- Fish.
- Meat.

# Fluids

The kidneys remove waste products. Your body needs fluids for that. Therefore, drink 1.5 to 2 litres of fluid per day. This is a minimum of 10 glasses or 13 cups of fluids per day. Keep an eye on the colour of your urine: the lighter, the better.



Tips for drinking enough:

- Spread drinks over the whole day.
- Drink at least half a litre of fluid in the morning, afternoon and evening.
- Vary taste and temperature.
- Drink breakfast drink, drinking yoghurt or a milkshake. Soup and ice cream or water ice also contains fluid.

Some treatments require extra fluids to protect your kidneys. If necessary, you will be given an IV during your hospital stay.

## Problems with eating and drinking

Cancer and its treatments can significantly affect what you eat and drink.

Problems you may have:

- Weight loss.
- Changes in the sense of taste and smell.
- Nausea and vomiting.
- Fatigue.
- Constipation.
- Diarrhoea.
- A dry mouth.
- A sore mouth, throat, or oesophagus.
- Unintentional weight gain.

# Advice for weight loss

- Maintain a healthy diet.
- Spread your food throughout the day. Eat (smaller) portions more often, for example, every two hours. Have a snack with your coffee or tea. Or drink milk, drinking yoghurt or fruit juice.
- If you can tolerate them, use full-fat products instead of low-fat or diet products. Full-fat products are, for example, full-fat milk, full-fat yoghurt and 48+ cheese.
- Spread lots of butter or margarine on bread and breakfast cake, top your bread thickly and melt a knob of butter into vegetables, mashed potatoes or porridge. Pour a dash of pouring cream, sour cream or crème fraiche into coffee, custard, porridge, yoghurt, fruit purée, soup and sauce.
- Add sugar to tea, coffee, yoghurt and porridge.
- Between meals, have a bowl of porridge, custard, fruits in juice, a piece of French or other cheese, a piece of sausage, a currant bun or a salad. Or opt for fruit juices, drinking yoghurt, chocolate milk, a dessert, ice cream or breakfast cake.
- Do not eat too many raw vegetables. Raw food makes you feel full quickly. Opt for cooked vegetables (with butter), fruit juice or purée instead. Broth and soup also give a feeling of fullness quickly but provide little or no calories. You can eat broth or soup to get enough fluids.
- If you continue to lose weight, then you can add extra nutrients to your diet or eat things that provide a lot of energy.

# Advice on taste and smell changes

- Smell and taste go together. Sometimes you will taste more if you chew well.
- Try many different products. Keep in mind that your appetite and taste preferences can change from day to day. So does your sense of smell. What is not good at one time might be good at another and vice versa. Dishes that you used not to like so much can now also taste good.
- It is extra important that food looks good.
- It is better not to eat products that you dislike. These are often dishes with a strong odour, such as roasted/fried meat and coffee. You can replace meat with fish, chicken, meat products, cheese, egg or a vegetarian product. You can also put meat in a sauce.
- Try bland foods such as pasta, rice, or porridge.
- Temperature affects the taste. Check at which temperature dishes taste best. You may often have less appetite for hot dishes so eat bread or salad.
- Stay out of the kitchen while cooking is taking place. If you cook yourself: use the microwave. Then you will be less bothered by food odours.
- Drink enough. You may have a bad taste in your mouth from drinking too little. Sometimes a bad taste disappears for a while by eating something with a strong taste, such as a peppermint.
- Sour foods often taste good. For example, fruit, yoghurt, cucumber, herring or a salad.
- Good oral care can (temporarily) reduce a bad taste.

- Sometimes nothing tastes good. Try to eat something anyway. Remember that it is necessary for your recovery or to maintain your fitness.

## Advice for nausea and vomiting

- Medications often help with nausea. Talk to your doctor or nurse to see if you can get them.
- Dehydration makes nausea worse, so try to drink enough every day.
- Avoid the sight and smell of food. Put away any uneaten food immediately.
- Nausea can arise or be made worse by an empty stomach. You can 'eat away' that nausea. Eat several



small meals a day. Morning sickness sometimes gets better if you eat a piece of toast or rusk before getting up.

- Try whether drinking coke that is not too cold helps.
- Before treatment, it is important to know what kind of nausea and vomiting you are experiencing. This says something about the cause. Therefore keep track of:

- When you suffer from nausea and/or vomiting.
- Whether there is a connection with food or drink.
- Whether you throw up a lot or a little.
- What your vomit looks like.
- Whether the nausea and/or vomiting is related to your posture.
- What else is bothering you, e.g. thirst, headache, a belly that is getting bigger.

## Advice for fatigue

- If preparing meals costs you a lot of energy, then eat ready-made products, frozen meals or products from cans, packs or jars. The nutritional value is almost the same as that of fresh products. Fresh fruit is healthier than tinned fruit.
- Ask someone to do the shopping and cooking for you.
- Spread the food over the day. Often a small amount of food is less tiring than an extensive meal.
- Eat liquid foods more often. A bowl of porridge, custard, breakfast drink or yoghurt is easier to eat than a sandwich.



- When you feel a bit fitter, make larger portions. You can store the extra portions in the refrigerator for one to two days or freeze them.
- Please note that you may still be tired for a long time after the treatment.

# Advice on constipation

- If you poo less than once every three days or your poo is hard and pooing hurts, then talk to your doctor about whether you can be given a laxative.
- Are you on opiates (painkillers)? Always discuss with your doctor whether a laxative is a good idea.
- Drink at least two litres of fluid per day. This means 13 glasses or 16 cups of fluids per day. Soup, custard and yoghurt also count.
- If your doctor has prescribed you fibre, then it is important that you get enough fluids. With too little fluid, fibre can actually clog the intestine. By recording this for a day, you can check whether you are getting enough fluids. You can also tell by the colour of your urine: the lighter, the better.
- Choose foods high in dietary fibre, such as:
  - Brown and fine wholewheat bread, wholewheat rusk and wholewheat breakfast cake.
  - Grain products such as oatmeal, muesli and breakfast drinks with dietary fibre.
  - Fresh fruit, fruit purée, fruit drink with extra dietary fibre, prunes and fruit juice with pulp.
  - Vegetables, both cooked and raw.
  - Potatoes, (wholemeal) pasta and (brown) rice.
  - Pulse soups such as pea soup and kidney bean soup; these can be pureed.
  - Special plum syrups with a laxative effect.
  - Dietary preparations containing fibre.
- There are no foods that stop bowel movements. A banana, for example, contains fibre.

## Advice for diarrhoea

Drink at least two litres of fluid per day. This means a minimum of 13 glasses or 16 cups of fluids per day. Soup, custard and yoghurt also count.

- Diarrhoea can cause you to lose a lot of salts. You can replenish these with broth, for example.
- Drink coffee in moderation. In any case, make sure that the coffee is not too strong.



- Avoid carbonated drinks, such as soft drinks or sparkling water.
- Sour milk products, such as buttermilk, are better than regular milk products, such as full-fat milk, custard and cream. Drink a maximum of three glasses and/or

portions per day of regular milk products.

- Eat regularly and calmly, chew well and eat small meals more often.
- Foods that stop bowel movements do not exist. Banana, white bread, rusk, and grated apple are therefore not blocking foods.
- Fibres bind the excess fluid in the stool a little bit. So eat brown bread, fine wholewheat bread, potatoes and fruit, but do not overdo the use of fibre.
- Avoid foods with coarse fibres such as dark rye bread, coarse wholewheat bread, bread with seeds and kernels, muesli, raw vegetables and fibrous fruits such as citrus fruit, plums and pineapple. Coarse fibres stimulate the intestines more.
- Do not eat:
  - Large, greasy meals.
  - Products that make you gassy, such as leeks, cabbage, pulses and onions. Cauliflower, chopped sauerkraut and Chinese cabbage are possible.
  - Spicy herbs. These stimulate your intestines more.

If you have had watery diarrhoea for a long time, discuss this with your GP. Your doctor can prescribe medication so that you better digest and absorb food.

## Advice for a dry mouth

- Always take small sips of water or another drink when eating. This means solid food becomes moist when chewing, and you can swallow the food more easily.
- Have plenty of gravy, sauce or broth with your hot meal. Try pasta with sauce, ragout or a meal soup.
- Spread bread with creamy toppings, such as cheese spread, scrambled eggs, pâté, liver pate, meat or fish salad, mashed fruit, jam or honey. Use lots of butter/ margarine.
- Dip bread in milk, tea or not too salty broth.
- Replace bread with porridge, custard or yoghurt. Also, opt for breakfast products such as muesli or cornflakes with yoghurt or milk or a breakfast drink.
- Suck on ice cubes, water ice, peppermint or chew gum. This makes your salivary glands work better. Preferably have sugar-free and acid-free sweets. Or chew on fresh and sour products, such as cucumber, apple, tomato, gherkins or pickled onions.
- Always have something to drink with you, even at night.
- Consult with your doctor about whether artificial saliva might be useful for you.

- Rinse your mouth carefully after every meal and after eating sweet or sour products.
- Frequently rinse or spray your mouth with saline or saline soda solution in between.
- Make sure you have a clean mouth because the risk of inflammation and cavities in teeth is greater with a dry mouth. Brush after each meal with a soft toothbrush and fluoride toothpaste. Or use a menthol-free or mild toothpaste. Brush up to four times a day.
- Limit the use of products with caffeine and alcohol. These products ensure less saliva in your mouth.
- Do not eat highly spiced and hot foods.

## Advice for pain in the mouth or throat

- Always take small sips of water or another drink when eating.
- Do not eat sharp herbs and spices, such as pepper, mustard, sambal and garlic. You can usually eat green herbs, such as dill, parsley, chervil or thyme.
- Do not eat salty foods, such as smoked cold meats (e.g. smoked meat), smoked fish (e.g. mackerel), broth, pretzels, chips, salted peanuts and salted liquorice.
- Drinking with a thick, short straw and eating with a small plastic spoon may be pleasant.
- Allow hot drinks and dishes to cool to room temperature.
- Sometimes ice, ice cubes or cold drinks are pleasant to use.

- Avoid soft drinks and (strong) alcohol.
- Choose less acidic fruits such as strawberries, pears, peaches, bananas and melon or drink squashes with a lot of vitamin C. Fruit and fruit juices are diluted by adding a milk product. For example, custard with fruit or an ice cream milkshake with fruit juice. Fruit can be too acidic for sensitive mucous membranes.
- Do not eat hard products that can damage the mucous membranes, such as bread crusts, nuts, pieces of hard fruit and hard baked dishes. Mash the food well or have porridge instead of bread. Be extra careful with bones and fishbones.
- Crispy foods and hard crusts are softened by dipping them in milk, not too salty broth or soup.
- Sometimes it is better to eat mashed or liquid food (for a while).
- Rinse your mouth regularly with saline or saline soda solution.
- For some people, sage or chamomile tea without sugar helps.
- Talk to your doctor about which pain relievers can help.
- You may have less pain in your mouth and throat with good oral care.



## Advice in case of unwanted weight gain

Try to avoid or limit weight gain by:

- Avoiding sweet and savoury snacks as much as possible.
- Using semi-skimmed, skimmed and diet products instead of full-fat products.
- Not eating sugar.
- Being more active.

If you are very hungry, try the following tips:

- Choose foods that are low in energy. For example, fruit, low-fat dairy products without sugar, a biscuit or slice of bread, toast with low-fat cheese or a bowl of raw vegetables with a low-fat dressing.
- Spread the meals throughout the day. Do not eat too large portions.
- Drink a lot, for example, diet soft drinks, water, and tea and coffee without sugar. Drink fruit juice in moderation because it also contains calories.
- You will feel full quickly from a fibre-rich diet. Therefore choose wholewheat bread, brown rice, wholewheat pasta and a large portion of fruit and vegetables.
- Sit down at the table when you eat and take your time.

## Losing weight

It is better not to lose weight during the treatment, as this will put extra strain on your body. Try to lose weight responsibly after the treatment.

## Diet food

If you want to supplement your diet with diet food, discuss this with your doctor or dietitian.

Examples of diet foods are:

- Liquid nutrition.
- Diet preparations.
- Tube feeding.

## Questions?



If you have any questions about the 'Diet during cancer' leaflet, you can contact the oncology nurse on workdays during office hours on telephone number: 780 0493.

For further detailed information about diet during cancer, see [www.kwf.nl](http://www.kwf.nl)



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