Palliative Care Nutrition Resource Guide
If You Want to Eat

Eating well can be very challenging when you do not feel well. Good nutrition can make you feel stronger, help you fight infection, cope with stress, and renew your spirits. If you want to eat, but are having problems eating, try the following suggestions.

Suggestions

Eat what you can when you can.

Your appetite and interest in food may change from day to day. There may be times when you cannot eat. Do not worry about "meal times", instead eat when you can.

- Take advantage of "up" times. Try to eat more when you are feeling better.
- When you feel better, prepare meals and freeze individual servings.
- Eat when you feel hungry.
- Snack! Keep snacks handy for nibbling. Try cheese and crackers, muffins, nuts, trail mix, pudding, or applesauce.
- Eat smaller amounts more often.
- Eat high calorie, high protein foods.
- Try not to fill up on low calorie beverages such as tea, coffee, or diet drinks.

The atmosphere when eating is sometimes more important than the quantity of food eaten.

- Share mealtime with others.
- Put flowers on your table.
- Use attractive table settings.
- Listen to relaxing music while eating.
- Light candles.
- Eat dessert first!
- Include a relaxing walk before mealtime.
- A glass of wine or beer may stimulate your appetite. Check with your doctor first.
Nausea and Vomiting

Nausea and vomiting are common side effects of many treatments, therapies, medications, and disease processes. If not controlled, nausea and vomiting can keep you from getting the nutrients and energy you need.

Suggestions

- Ask your doctor about medications to help control nausea. Medication is often most effective if taken before meals.
- Sip on fluids regularly to avoid dehydration. Aim for 6 to 8 glasses (1 glass = 8 oz or 250 mL) per day.
- Eat slowly and try small snack sized meals frequently throughout the day.
- Try cool, bland, and nonodorous foods such as popsicles, juice, lemonade, plain cookies, dry toast, soda crackers, yogurt, sherbet, and ice cream.
- Soft drinks such as ginger ale or 7-Up™ may be better tolerated if allowed to go flat.
- Try ginger tea.
- Avoid spicy, greasy, or fried foods.
- If you find sweet foods especially nauseating, try salty foods instead.
- Avoid favourite foods when you feel nauseated.
- Sit in an upright position to make digestion easier. Relax and rest at least 30 minutes before each meal.
- Wear loose fitting clothing in a comfortable environment and avoid hot stuffy rooms. Open a window for a little fresh air.
- Stay away from food preparation areas. Have family or friends help you with food preparation, if possible.
- When nausea is worst, try only small amounts of clear fluids and start your diet slowly to include soft, bland foods and then a regular diet as tolerated.
- Never force yourself to eat when nauseated.
- Rinse your mouth with a nonalcohol based mouth wash before and after eating.
Sore Mouth and Throat

A sore mouth, throat or esophagus may be caused by radiotherapy, chemotherapy, medications or infections and may make it painful to eat and drink. Your doctor may be able to prescribe medications to ease mouth or throat pain.

Suggestions

- Try soft, moist, easy to chew and swallow foods such as milkshakes, puddings, soft fruits, bananas, applesauce, watermelon, cottage cheese, mashed potatoes, macaroni and cheese, cream soup, cheesecake, eggnog, cooked or dry cereals soaked in milk, eggs, or blenderized meats with gravy.
- Make smoothies with soothing fruits, such as melons, bananas or peaches. Add yogurt, frozen yogurt, milk, ice cream, or silken tofu for extra protein.
- Use butter, margarine, gravy, oils, and creamy sauces to moisten foods.
- Try cool or room temperature foods.
- Sucking on a frozen popsicle may help numb the pain in your mouth.
- Avoid irritating foods such as citrus fruit or juices, tomatoes, spicy or salty foods, rough, coarse, or dry foods such as raw vegetables, granola, or dry toast.
- Add sugar, honey, or corn syrup to tone down acidic and salty foods.
- Rinse your mouth with a nonalcohol based rinsing solution to help cleanse your mouth before and after eating. Suggestions include
  - baking soda (1 teaspoon or 5 mL) and water (2 cups or 16 oz. 500 mL)
  - salt (1/2 teaspoon or 2.5 mL), baking soda (1 teaspoon or 5 mL) and water (4 cups or 32 oz 1000 mL)
  - club soda.

Acknowledgements: Nutritional Care of the Terminally Ill, Mead Johnson, Canadian Cancer Society, McGill Cancer Nutrition Rehabilitation Program. CHPCA - A Caregiver's Guide.
Difficulty Chewing and Swallowing

If you are having chewing and/or swallowing difficulties and the previous suggestions for sore mouth and throat have not worked, you may wish to try the following suggestions.

Suggestions

- Eat slowly with very small bites and remain in a relaxed, upright position.
- Tilt your head forward or backwards to make swallowing easier.
- Cut up, mince, or blend foods according to your own tolerance.
- If solid foods are hard to swallow, try nutritional supplements such as Ensure™, Boost™, Breakfast Anytime™, or other energy dense liquids like eggnog, milkshakes, or whole milk fortified with dry skim milk powder.
- If liquids are difficult to swallow, try adding a thickening agent. Talk to your palliative care coordinator or dietitian about what to use as a thickening agent.
- If you continue to have problems swallowing or are coughing and choking with swallowing, talk to your doctor about a Speech Language Pathologist (SLP) referral.

Acknowledgements: Saskatchewan Cancer Foundation, Mead Johnson.
Dry Mouth and Thick Saliva

A dry mouth can be caused by chemotherapy or radiation to the head and neck area which may change the amount and type of saliva your mouth produces. A dry mouth may change the way food tastes.

Suggestions

- Rinse your mouth with a mouth rinse before and after meals, and often throughout the day to help cleanse and refresh your mouth. Suggestions include
  - baking soda (1 teaspoon or 5 mL) and water (2 cups or 16 oz. or 500 mL)
  - salt (1/2 teaspoon or 2.5 mL), baking soda (1 teaspoon or 5 mL) and water (4 cups or 32 oz or 1000 mL)
  - club soda
- Sip on liquids frequently to help keep your mouth moist. Keep a bottle of your favorite beverage nearby and aim for 6 to 8 glasses (1 glass = 8 oz or 250 mL) of fluid daily.
- Use extra gravies, butters, margarines, and sauces to help moisten foods.
- Sucking on sugar free candy, chewing gum, or popsicles may help to produce more saliva.
- Try sweet or tart drinks such as lemonade or sucking on sour lemons which may also help produce more saliva. (Do not try this if you are also suffering from sore mouth).
- If milk products are difficult to use, try lower fat milk products such as 1% or skim milk. Drink water after sipping milk to rinse out your mouth.
- Keep your lips moist or use a room humidifier to alleviate dry lips and mouth (consult cancer clinic if you are undergoing radiation).
Taste Changes

Your taste for certain foods may change. You may find favourite foods may no longer be appealing or have no taste. Each person’s taste may be affected differently so you have to try a variety of different foods to find what works for you

Suggestions

- If you have a distaste for red meat try poultry, fish, ham, eggs, peanut butter, dairy products, tofu, or legumes to help meet your protein needs.
- Try marinating foods in beer, wine, barbeque sauce, butter, or fruit juice, or experiment with different seasonings and spices.
- Try using plastic utensils and dishes if food tastes metallic.
- Add sugar to tone down the taste of salty foods or add salt to tone down the taste of sweet foods.
- Sucking on sour lemons or tart sugar free candies and gum may help to eliminate bad taste in your mouth.
- Try citrus juices, lemonade, cranberry juice, or pickles. (Do not try these foods if you have a sore mouth and throat).
- Sip on fluids often and rinse your mouth with a mouth wash before and after meals.

Acknowledgements: Nutritional Care of the Terminally Ill, Saskatchewan Cancer Foundation.
When You Feel Bloated

Bloating or gas may be caused by the disease process, certain foods, or swallowing air. When there is a buildup of fluid or gas in the abdomen, you may feel full after just a few bites of food. This feeling of fullness or tightness reduces your appetite.

Suggestions

- Eat slowly and keep mouth closed when chewing and swallowing.
- Relax before and after meals and avoid lying down immediately after eating.
- Have your beverages and soups between meals rather than with solid foods.
- Avoid gas producing foods such as alcohol, beer, carbonated beverages, high fat foods, beans, onions, cabbage, cucumbers, garlic, broccoli, brussel sprouts, cauliflower, mushrooms, and spinach.

Acknowledgements: Nutritional Care of the Terminally Ill, Saskatchewan Cancer Foundation.
Heartburn

Heartburn or a feeling of indigestion can have many causes. By not eating you may be worsening your heartburn.

Suggestions

- Have frequent small meals and snacks instead of 3 large meals.
- Sleep with your upper body elevated on pillows.

Avoid the following:

- caffeine containing foods such as coffee, tea, chocolate, and energy drinks
- alcohol and carbonated beverages
- fatty, fried foods, or very spicy foods
- mint flavored candy and gum
- bending or lying down after eating
- eating 2 hours before going to bed.
When You Are Feeling Tired

When you are tired and fatigued you may not feel like preparing food or eating due to lack of energy.

Suggestions

- Accept the offer of family and friends to help you out with shopping, cooking, or preparing meals.
- Rest 1 to 2 hours before each meal.
- Try small, frequent meals consisting of soft, easy to chew foods.
- Use canned, frozen, convenience, and ready to eat foods if possible.
- Keep ready to eat snacks available to nibble on throughout the day. Try having trail mix, nuts, crackers and cheese, hard boiled eggs, puddings, yogurt, granola bars, dried fruit, and ice cream nearby.
- Consider convenience meal programs, frozen meals, or grocery delivery. Talk to your palliative care coordinator for more information on frozen meal programs available in your community.
Protein and calories help to provide your body with energy and nutrients. When you are not feeling well, it may be difficult to meet your protein and energy needs. Consider these high protein and high calorie food suggestions.

**Suggestions**

### High Protein Foods

- Add powdered skim milk to foods and beverages to increase protein content. Add 2 to 3 tablespoons (1 tablespoon = 15 mL) to cream soups, mashed potatoes, hot cereal, yogurt, pudding, milk, coffee, tea, and casseroles.
- Add chopped hard boiled eggs in sandwiches, salads and stir fry. Egg substitute can be added to milkshakes, bread pudding, eggnog, custard, or rice pudding. Raw eggs are not recommended as they may cause food poisoning.
- Add chopped meats, grated cheese, tofu or canned fish to soups, stir frys, salads, and casseroles.
- Other good sources of protein are cottage cheese, nuts and seeds, peanut butter, dried peas, beans, and lentils.

### High Calorie Foods

- In recipes use cream or half-and-half in place of milk.
- Add butter, margarine, or gravy to foods.
- Use other high calorie sauces and spreads such as mayonnaise, sour cream, cream cheese, whipping cream, caramel sauce, hot fudge sauce, or butterscotch sauce.
- Use high calorie, high energy supplements such as Boost™, Ensure™, milkshakes, or try this high calorie, high protein drink

**Recipe:**

1 cup (8 oz or 250 mL) whole milk  
1/4 cup (2 oz or 62.5 mL) powdered skim milk  
1 package Breakfast Anytime™  
1/2 teaspoon (2.5 mL) vanilla or other flavoring

Mix in glass or make up a large jug to sip on throughout the day.

Acknowledgements: Canadian Cancer Society, RQHR Nutrition and Food Services.
Constipation

Constipation may be caused by medications, inactivity, dehydration, or a low fibre diet. If constipation persists for more than several days, you may wish to call your doctor or nurse before trying any of the suggestions in this booklet.

Suggestions

Hydration

- If possible, drink 6 to 8 cups (1 cup = 8 oz or 250 mL) of fluid each day.
- Water, juice, soups, herbal teas, milk, and caffeine free soft drinks are good choices. Keep coffee and regular tea to a minimum.

Food Choices

- Choose foods that contain natural laxatives such as prunes, prune juice, and rhubarb.
- Choose high fibre foods like whole grain breads and crackers, fruits and vegetables, dried beans, peas, and popcorn.
- Add small amounts of bran to whenever you cook or bake.
- Try the following recipe and spread 1 tablespoon (15 mL) (once a day) on toast or mix with hot cereal or yogurt

  **Fruit Lax Spread**

  1/2 cup (125 mL) pitted dates
  3/4 cup (187.5 mL) prune nectar
  1/2 cup 125 mL) figs
  3/4 cup (187.5 mL) raisins
  1/2 cup (125 mL) pitted prunes

  Simmer dates and prune nectar until the dates are very soft. Put date mixture in a blender and add figs, raisins and prunes. Blend until smooth. Store in a covered container in the refrigerator for up to one week.

Medications

- Consult with your doctor or nurse about a stool softener or laxatives.
Diarrhea

Certain drugs, chemotherapy, and pelvic radiation may irritate the intestines and cause loose bowel movements or diarrhea.

Suggestions

Hydration
- Drink plenty of liquids, since diarrhea causes a loss of fluids and minerals that you must replace.
- Try diluted juices (1 part juice and 1 part water), herbal teas, bouillon, broth, consommé, caffeine free soft drinks, Gatorade™, and Kool Aid™.
- Avoid beverages that contain caffeine such as coffee, tea, chocolate, cola, or energy drinks.
- Avoid alcoholic beverages.

Food Choices
- Choose low fibre fruits and vegetables such as bananas, applesauce, melons, peaches, pears, pineapple, potatoes, beans, asparagus, carrots, squash, mushrooms, beets, peppers, zucchini, cauliflower, bean sprouts, lettuce, spinach, tomato juice, paste, or sauce.
- Avoid high fibre fruits and vegetables such as berries, dried fruits, rhubarb, coconut, strawberries, broccoli, corn, green peas, brussel sprouts, egg plant, sweet potatoes, and parsnips.
- Remove the skins and seeds from all fruits and vegetables.
- Avoid high fat foods such as bacon, sausages, and fried foods.
- Avoid nuts, seeds, dried beans, peas, and lentils.
- Choose low fibre breads and cereals including white bread, white rice, pasta, cornmeal, oatmeal, tapioca, Rice Krispies™, Cheerios™, and Special K™.
- Choose potassium rich foods such as banana, tomato juice, vegetable juice, apricot or peach nectar, fish, potatoes, and meat.

When You Just Cannot Eat

When you are nearing the end of life, it is natural that you may not feel hungry or thirsty in the way that you used to. You might not feel like eating, and this is okay. Your body is slowing down and requires less food and fluid to function. Forcing yourself to eat may make you feel worse. Eat and drink when you want to, and when you feel you can.

A Message to Friends and Family

The loss of appetite is common in the last stage of life and is very difficult to overcome. During this time, support your loved one in his or her decision to no longer be concerned with eating or drinking.

It is important to know that loss of appetite does not contribute to suffering and that terminally ill patients can be comfortable despite little, if any, foods or fluids.

Recognize your loved ones wishes, and acknowledge their right to decide not only what, but if they eat. Insisting that they eat when they do not feel like it may result in feeling of fullness, nausea or vomiting. What is really needed is "permission" to stop the struggle to eat. Let your loved one decide how much, what and when they eat.

Instead of focusing on food, try to spend time comforting your loved one in other ways. You may wish to spend time:

- talking and sharing memories
- playing your loved one’s favourite music
- massaging his or her hands and feet
- just being there for your loved one.

Dry mouth and lips can be kept moist with ice chips and small sips of water, lip balms, and mouth care (ask your palliative care nurse to show you how).
Artificial Hydration (Fluids) and Nutrition (Foods)

Artificial hydration and nutrition can provide people with fluids and foods when they are no longer able to eat or drink. This includes intravenous (IV) fluids, tube feeding, and IV nutrition (Total Parenteral Nutrition - TPN).

Artificial hydration and nutrition is not necessary to provide comfort in the last stages of life. It may actually make a person more uncomfortable by contributing to shortness of breath, swelling, vomiting, diarrhea, and cramps. Artificial hydration and nutrition will not bring a person back to a healthy condition.

Talk to your family members about your wishes regarding artificial hydration and nutrition. Your doctor, and the other members of your palliative care team, can help you better understand the benefits and burdens.

If you are making these decisions for your loved one, consider the following questions. Every person and situation is different. Your palliative care team can help you determine what might be best in your situation.

- What do you think your loved one might have wanted?
- What are the goals of care?
- Is the main goal comfort?
- What do the members of the palliative care team recommend?
Community Resources

Nutrition Products Program

If you are having trouble getting the nutrition you need through food, you may want to consider supplements such as Ensure™ or Boost™. These supplements may be purchased at the grocery store or pharmacy. They may be provided by the Regina Qu'Appelle Health Region Nutrition Products Program or Palliative Care Services.

For more information on supplements or the Nutrition Products Program, call your palliative care coordinator or dietitian.

REACH Convenience Meal Program

If you are having difficulty preparing meals, the REACH Convenience Meal Program may be helpful to you.

REACH provides frozen meals and soups that are appropriate for many therapeutic diets including diabetic and pureed meals. They provide milk, bread, and fresh fruit and vegetables. Orders can be picked up or delivered.

For more information on the REACH Convenience Meal Program contact REACH by phone at (306) 347-3224 or email at reach2@sasktel.net or call your palliative care coordinator or dietitian.