



## NUTRITION



### **HEALTHY EATING AND SAFE FOOD HANDLING**

are important factors in health and recovery during cancer treatment. Appetite changes from the cancer and side effects from certain treatment will affect your loved one's ability to eat or maintain proper nutrition. What is healthy to eat and what isn't healthy to eat will not always be straightforward. Favorite foods or go-to beverages may not be the best choices for your loved one. It is important for you to be supportive (but tactful) and help your loved one to make good food choices.

## Caregiver role in nutrition

Food provides valuable nutrients. Eating well during cancer treatment helps to speed recovery, ease side effects, and keep the treatment plan running smoothly. However, your loved one may not be able to plan grocery lists, grocery shop, eat, digest foods or prepare meals as he or she did before the onset of his or her illness. This is where you, as the caregiver, can help.



Depending on the health of your loved one, you may need to assist with

- Grocery shopping
- Meal preparation and cooking
- Encouraging your loved one to make healthy food choices
- Managing your loved one's treatment side effects

To get started, ask the appropriate member of the healthcare team about specific foods or meal recommendations and restrictions, if any. A printed meal plan or food list is often the best approach to nutrition planning. Ask for a referral to a registered dietitian for additional help.



Use worksheet:  
[\*Grocery List and Meal Planning\*](#)



[\*\*Get the LLS Health Manager app\*\*](#)  
Track food, hydration, meal planning and more!



Food may be a touchy subject for your loved one. Food choices are one of the few things over which he or she has control. At times, your loved one may be resistant to eating. Try to encourage your loved one to eat but don't be too forceful. Cancer treatment is an emotionally challenging time. Don't let disagreements over food turn into full-blown fights or arguments. Reach out to the healthcare team for support and resources.

### TIP

Nutrition advice is everywhere, but it's not all good information. Be cautious of nutrition advice that you find online, in magazines or advertisements and from well-meaning family and friends. To get nutrition information from a reliable source, talk to a registered dietitian.

## Food Choices

Having good nutrition starts with making good food choices. Proper nutrition can provide more energy and reduce the risk for diseases, such as heart disease and certain types of cancer. The food guidelines recommended for your loved one also apply to people without a cancer diagnosis. Take care of yourself by making good food choices too!

## Nutrition guidelines

### **Eat fruits and vegetables every day.**

Fruits and vegetables are part of a healthy diet, which will help your loved one stay strong during treatment. Choose a variety of colorful fruits and vegetables to get the greatest benefit. Encourage your loved one to eat plenty of fruits and vegetables daily.

### **Choose protein-rich foods.**

Protein helps the body to repair cells and tissues. It also helps the immune system to recover from illness. Include a source of lean protein at all meals and as snacks. Good sources of lean protein include

- Lean meats, such as chicken, fish, or turkey
- Eggs
- Low-fat dairy products, such as milk, yogurt, and cheese or dairy substitutes
- Nuts and nut butters
- Beans
- Soy foods

### **Add whole grains.**

Whole grains provide a good source of carbohydrates and fiber which help keep energy levels up. Good sources of whole grains include

- Oatmeal
- Whole-wheat breads
- Brown rice
- Whole-grain pastas

### **Choose sources of healthy fat.**

Avoid fried, greasy, and fatty foods. Choose baked, broiled, or grilled foods instead. Healthy fats include

- Olive oil/canola oil
- Avocados
- Nuts
- Seeds

### **Limit sweets and added sugars.**

Foods high in added sugars, such as desserts and sweets, provide little nutritional benefit and often take the place of other foods that are better for your loved one.

### **Stay hydrated.**

Drinking enough fluids during cancer treatment is important for preventing dehydration. A good starting goal is to drink 2 litres of fluid daily. Your loved one's fluid goal may be different so ask for guidance from the healthcare team. Your loved one should avoid drinking large amounts of caffeinated beverages. Too much caffeine can lead to dehydration.

### **Check with the healthcare team before taking any vitamins or supplements.**

Some medications and cancer treatments may interact with vitamins and supplements. Choose food as the main source for nutrients. If your loved one already takes supplements, give the healthcare team a list of them.

### **Drink alcohol in moderation, if at all.**

Alcohol may contribute to dehydration. It can lower the abilities of the immune system and provides no beneficial nutrients.



## Malnutrition

Malnutrition is a serious concern for many people receiving cancer treatment. A person who is not receiving or absorbing proper nutrition and the right amount of calories or nutrients needed for healthy bodily function, will become malnourished. If your loved one is malnourished, he or she is at greater risk for health complications, hospitalization, infections, loss of muscle strength and poor quality of life.

To decrease the risk of malnutrition, your loved one should try to avoid losing weight during treatment unless advised to do so by the healthcare team. Strict dieting is not recommended during cancer treatment. Losing weight can lower your loved one's energy level and decrease the body's ability to fight infection. As much as possible, your loved one should aim to maintain a stable weight during treatment. Even with these serious risks, nutrition problems may be overlooked. As a caregiver, you can help watch for the signs and/or symptoms of malnutrition.

They include

- Unintentional weight loss
- Loss of appetite
- Changes in food intake
- Side effects that make eating difficult

### Nutrition status

Take this short quiz to see if your loved one may be at risk for malnutrition. Check either Yes or No for each statement.

My loved one...	Yes	No
Has lost 5 to 10 lbs or more without trying in the last 3 months.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Is eating less due to decreased appetite.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Has changed his or her food intake.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Side effects make it difficult for him or her to eat (eg, nausea, taste changes, sore mouth, trouble swallowing, diarrhea, constipation, dental issues).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
No longer enjoys meal-times as much as he or she did before the onset of cancer.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

If you checked "Yes" to one or more of the questions above, alert the healthcare team. Your loved one may be at risk for malnutrition. If your loved one is unable to eat enough food, or drink enough fluids by mouth for proper nutrition, he or she may need nutrition therapy. This means that nutrition is either given via a feeding tube or intravenously. If your loved one needs a feeding tube, members of the healthcare team will teach you how to care for the tube, administer nutrition, and closely monitor weight loss.



## Food safety

The immune system is weakened during cancer treatment. It is important to pay special attention to food safety during cancer treatment to reduce your loved one's risk of being exposed to potentially harmful bacteria from spoiled or undercooked foods.

### What you should do

- Wash hands often and thoroughly.
- Clean all cooking surfaces before and after each use.
- Cook food thoroughly. Follow Health Canada's guidelines for safe cooking temperatures.
- Keep raw and cooked food separate.
- Store food within an hour of purchasing or cooking it.
- Label food with a "use by" date before storing.
- Wash all fruits and vegetables before cutting, peeling or eating.

### What you should avoid

- Reusing cutting boards, utensils, plates or other dishes that have been touched by raw meats or uncooked eggs without first washing them.
- Eating raw foods like sushi, cookie dough, and homemade mayonnaise.
- Eating meats or seafood not cooked to proper internal temperature.
- Eating soft or unpasteurized cheeses.
- Eating raw sprouts such as alfalfa sprouts.
- Drinking unpasteurized juice or milk.
- Taking free food samples when shopping.
- Eating at buffet restaurants.

### If you suspect a foodborne illness

You or your loved one may get a foodborne illness, so have a plan in place. Signs and symptoms of foodborne illness include fever, diarrhea, nausea, vomiting, and/or stomach cramps.

#### What you should do

- Alert the healthcare team as soon as possible.
- Mark any recently eaten food or beverage as "do not eat."
- Keep the containers in the fridge in case the healthcare team wants to test any of the potentially contaminated foods.

## Grocery shopping

A trip to the grocery store may be a tiring event for someone with cancer. Your loved one may need a little help, such as a ride to the store or help carrying heavy items. If your loved one has limited stamina and immunity, grocery shopping may not be possible. Here is where a caregiver, friends, relatives, and neighbours can really provide help.

## Grocery shopping tips

These following grocery shopping tips will make the trip easier.

### **Shop with a list.**

Make copies of a standardized grocery list, which includes perishables such as milk and bread. It can be added to each week. Add in-season fruits and veggies. Add any new items for changes in special dietary needs.

### **Shop early in the day.**

If you live in warmer climates and shop early in the day, the food will stay cold while you are driving, and it will be cooler when you are unloading the groceries at home. The grocery store may also be less crowded, as many people tend to shop after work or on weekends.

### **Bring a cooler.**

If you plan to buy chilled or frozen foods, take a cooler with you to keep the food at a safe temperature until you get home.

### **Check the dates.**

People with cancer often have decreased immunity. This means that they are at a greater risk for infection and disease. Be sure to only purchase foods that have not passed the expiration date. Also, don't purchase foods with damaged packaging.

### **Read the label.**

Some dietary restrictions may limit specific ingredients, such as acid, alcohol, fiber, grapefruit, iodine, lactose, or sodium. The healthcare team or a registered dietitian can provide a written list of suggested and restricted foods.

### **Grab cold foods last.**

When shopping, select fresh items and room temperature items first. Then grab cold and frozen foods right before you check out at the grocery store. This helps keep the cold and frozen foods at a safe temperature on the drive home.

### **Check out food delivery and pickup services.**

Many grocery stores offer pickup services. Send a list to the store ahead of time. A store employee then puts together the grocery order. Once your groceries are ready, go to the store, and an employee will load them in to your car. If a trip to the grocery store isn't feasible, think about having groceries delivered to your door.

### **Treat your loved one.**

Your loved one may be on a limited budget for food. If you spot a special food, flower, or magazine that the he or she might enjoy, pick it up if you can.



LEUKEMIA &  
LYMPHOMA  
SOCIETY  
OF CANADA\*

**Never hesitate to contact us, we're here to help!**

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