

Cancer and its treatments may affect your child's appetite. It can also change how your child eats and how the body uses nutrients in food.

Why is nutrition important?

Getting the right nutrition will help your child:

- Fight and prevent infection.
- Grow and develop.
- Get better after surgery.
- Gain strength. This helps your child do the things they like to do.
- Better tolerate treatments and the side effects.

What nutrients does my child need?

All people need carbohydrates, protein and fat; the building blocks of nutrition. In patients getting cancer treatment these building blocks are very important because they help your child continue to grow and develop. Other nutrients and hydration are important too, like vitamins, minerals and water.

Proteins

- Promote growth
- Support muscle development and prevents muscle breakdown
- Repair all body tissues
- Boost the immune system
- Found in meat, beans and legumes, nuts and seeds, and dairy products

Carbohydrates

- Provide energy and promotes growth
- Fuel the brain
- Found in fruits, vegetables, grains, beans and legumes

Fats

- Provide energy
- Help absorption of fat soluble vitamins, A, D, E and K
- Protect organs and brain
- Found in avocado, meat, some dairy products, nuts and seeds, oils and butter

Vitamins/Minerals

- Children may not get enough vitamins and minerals if they are not eating well. Ask your healthcare team whether a daily multivitamin is needed. Certain vitamins are not allowed as they may impact your treatment.

Fluids

- All beverages count towards hydration. Water and milk are best, but sugary beverages like 100% juice are ok to have in moderation.
- Children may become dehydrated if they are vomiting, have diarrhea or cannot drink enough fluids.

How will my child get nutrition during cancer treatment?

Your child will get nutrition in one or more of these ways:

Eating by mouth. The most natural way to provide nutrition is by eating and drinking. Sometimes it is hard to eat everything you need. Your dietitian may recommend changes to improve nutrition including:

- High calorie, high protein meals.
- High calorie drinks. This includes milkshakes, Carnation Breakfast or Pediasure.
- Small meals with frequent snacks.

Even with diet changes, your child may not be able to eat enough by mouth. Other ways to give nutrition may be used to keep your child from losing weight and muscle mass.

Appetite Stimulants are medicines that may be used to help increase your child's appetite.

Tube Feeding (Enteral Nutrition) may be used if your child needs more nutrition to meet calorie needs. Many children with a feeding tube can still eat by mouth.

- A thin and bendy tube is put in the nose and goes down into the stomach.
- Your dietitian will talk with you about formula options to use through the tube.
- If your child is not drinking enough, water can be given through the tube.
- Medicines can also be given through the tube.
- Children often feel better once tube feedings are started and may start eating more.
- Early use of tube feedings may be better than waiting until weight loss occurs.

IV Nutrition is used when tube feeding cannot be used. Your healthcare team and dietitian will provide nutrition through an IV. This is called total parenteral nutrition (TPN).

Other Important Nutrition Tips:

Providing foods that are safe for your child is important. Practicing food safety can help.

- Before preparing food, wash your hands for 20 seconds with soap and warm water.
- Rinse all fruits and vegetables.
- Keep hot food hot and cold food cold. Hot food should stay over 140 degrees after cooking. Cold food should be stored in the refrigerator below 40 degrees.
- Avoid unpasteurized milk products and juices and do not consume raw or undercooked meat or eggs.

ALERT: Call your child's doctor, nurse or clinic if you or your child have any concerns or if your child has special health care needs not covered by this information.

This document was created to help you care for your child or family member. It does not take the place of medical care. Talk with your healthcare provider for diagnosis, treatment and follow-up.