Good Nutrition During Head and Neck Cancer Treatment

Treatment of head and neck cancer may include chemotherapy, radiation therapy or even surgery. During this treatment period your body often needs extra calories and protein to help:

- Promote healing.
- Maintain your weight.
- Aid your recovery.

Preventing Weight Loss

During cancer treatment, it is important to prevent weight loss. You may not be able to eat the same portions of foods as before, so you should choose high calorie foods. Some people have a loss of appetite. It may be easier to eat smaller meals, more often. Try to:

- Eat every 2 to 3 hours if possible.
- Drink fluids between meals to prevent filling up too quickly at meals.
- Drink a liquid nutritional supplement such as Boost® or Ensure® if you are unable to eat enough food to meet your needs.

Choose a variety of foods that have both extra calories and protein. If you have any questions, ask your dietitian for advice.

High Calorie/High Protein Diet

Calories are needed for energy. A high calorie diet can spare protein from being used as the main source of calories to fuel your body. Your body uses protein to maintain and repair body tissues. A high calorie/high protein diet can give your body the energy and protein it needs at this time.
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<tr>
<th><strong>High Calorie Food Ideas</strong></th>
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| Butter, margarine, vegetable oils | • Spread on soft breads and pastries.  
• Melt on potatoes, rice, soft pasta, hot cereals, soft-cooked vegetables. |
| Heavy whipping cream         | • Add to mashed potatoes, pureed soups, desserts, eggs. |
| Avocado                     | • Garnish chili or black bean soup.  
• Blend into a smoothie or shake.  
• Spread on soft bread. |
| Peanut butter (or other creamy nut butter) | • Mix into smoothies or shakes.  
• Spread on bananas. |
| Ice Cream (dairy or non dairy milk) | • Blend with liquid nutrition supplement and your favorite fruit for a high calorie shake.  
• Eat with favorite fruit topping, fudge or caramel sauce and top with whip cream. |
| Mayonnaise                  | • Add extra to chicken, tuna, egg or potato salad. |
| Honey or maple syrup        | • Mix into yogurt, hot cereals.  
• Blend into smoothies, shakes.  
• Add to favorite fruits.  
• Top pancakes, French toast, waffles. |

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<tr>
<th><strong>High Protein Food Ideas</strong></th>
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| Eggs                        | • Serve omelets or scrambled with extra cheese.  
• Use to make custards, quiches, soufflés, egg salad. |
| Milk or non-dairy milk such as almond, soy or coconut | • Use in place of water in hot cereals, hot cocoa, soups.  
• Blend with fruit and yogurt to make smoothies. |
| Yogurt                      | • Drizzle with honey and favorite fruit.  
• Blend with fruit to make smoothies. |
| Cottage cheese or ricotta   | • Eat with fruit.  
• Add to pasta dishes, potatoes, casseroles.  
• Fold into pancake batter or desserts. |
| Tofu                        | • Add to cooked vegetables and soups.  
• Blend into smoothies or shakes.  
• Can be substituted in desserts such as chocolate mousse. |
Fortified Milk

Fortified milk can increase calories and protein. You can use this in place of milk in any recipe. This can be used when making:

- Hot cereals
- Mashed potatoes
- Soups
- Smoothies
- Shakes

| Beans and lentils | Puree to thicken soups.  
|                  | Top refried or mashed beans with cheese, avocado and sour cream for extra calories. |
| Canned tuna, crab or salmon | Mix with extra mayonnaise for softer texture.  
|                            | Make patties or croquettes. |
| Ground Meat        | Make meatloaf or meatballs.  
|                    | Serve with extra sauces or gravy. |

**Sample Recipe**

**Peanut Butter and Banana Smoothie**

- 1 cup of fortified milk
- 1 tablespoon creamy peanut butter or other smooth nut butter
- 1 frozen banana

Add ingredients and blend until desired consistency. Pour into a glass and serve. You may add ice cream to boost calories for a cool treat.

For a non-dairy option, mix together:

- 1 cup non-dairy milk (almond or soy milk)
- 1 scoop protein powder

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### Helpful Tips

**Dry or Sore Mouth**
- Choose soft, moist foods.
- Avoid foods that are acidic such as orange juice or tomato sauce. Avoid foods that are spicy or salty.
- Lemon drops, sugar-free mints, or sugar-free gum may help you make saliva.
- Add sauces, gravies, applesauce, sour cream or liquids such as broth to moisten foods.
- Eat mild foods such as custards, puddings, creamy soups, milk or non-dairy milk beverages.
- Cold foods may help to soothe your mouth.

**Difficulty Swallowing**

If you are having trouble swallowing, try eating soft or liquid foods. You may be able to swallow thick fluids more easily than thin liquids. Products are available to thicken fluids to a consistency that is easier to swallow.

- Drink 6 to 8 cups of fluid each day.
- Flavored waters, fruit nectars, and coconut or flavored milk beverages may be more appealing if you experience taste changes.

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### Sample Menu

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Breakfast</th>
<th>Morning Snack</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oatmeal or other hot cereal made with <strong>fortified milk</strong> topped with butter, coconut oil, maple syrup or brown sugar</td>
<td>Whole milk yogurt with fresh or canned peaches and honey</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mix in creamy nut butter, applesauce, apple butter, fruit preserves or soft banana for additional calories</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lunch</th>
<th>Afternoon Snack</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lentil soup (puree in blender if desired)</td>
<td>High calorie, high protein nutrition supplement of your choice</td>
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<tr>
<td>Soft bread and butter for dipping</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cottage cheese and mandarin oranges</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dinner</th>
<th>Evening Snack</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meatloaf and mashed potatoes with extra butter and gravy</td>
<td>Premium ice cream, non-dairy ice cream or Magic Cup® dessert with topping of your choice</td>
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<td>Creamed spinach on the side</td>
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</tbody>
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**Morning Snack**

- Whole milk yogurt with fresh or canned peaches and honey

**Afternoon Snack**

- High calorie, high protein nutrition supplement of your choice

**Evening Snack**

- Premium ice cream, non-dairy ice cream or Magic Cup® dessert with topping of your choice
- Use liquid nutritional supplements if you are unable to eat enough food to meet your needs. Examples include Boost® and Ensure®.
- Use a blender or food processor to make foods smoother to swallow.

Contact your doctor if you cough or choke while eating. Your doctor may refer you to a speech therapist who will help you to:
- Swallow more easily.
- Decrease coughing or choking during eating and drinking.

Be sure to follow your speech therapist’s instructions for any special eating instructions.

**Contact a Dietitian**

A dietitian can help you plan your diet during your cancer treatment. They can also help you to:
- Manage your symptoms that may affect your nutrition.
- Avoid complications.
- Improve your recovery time by helping you stay well-nourished and hydrated.

If you require a feeding tube during your cancer treatment, a dietitian will be available to guide you about the use of your tube and how to take care of it.

If you have not talked to a dietitian, please call to set up an appointment at 312.695.0990. We would be happy to assist you!

**Northwestern Medicine – Health Information Resources**

For more information, contact Northwestern Memorial Hospital’s Alberto Culver Health Learning Center (HLC) at hlc@nm.org, or by calling 312.926.5465. You may also visit the HLC on the 3rd floor, Galter Pavilion at 251 E. Huron St., Chicago, IL. Health information professionals can help you find the information you need and provide you with personal support at no charge.

For more information about Northwestern Medicine, please visit our website at nm.org.