

Diet and Nutrition During Head and Neck Cancer Treatment

Treatment of head and neck cancer may include chemotherapy, radiation therapy or even surgery. A healthy diet is an important part of your journey before, during and after treatment. Your body will likely need extra calories and protein to:

- Maintain your strength
- Keep your weight stable
- Improve your recovery time
- Fight infection
- Manage symptoms

Eating healthy is a very important part of your cancer treatment.

Preventing weight loss

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

- Eat a snack or small meal every 2 to 3 hours instead of waiting until you are hungry
- Choose soft, moist foods if you are having trouble eating a normal diet
- Drink a calorie- and protein-dense nutrition supplement such as BOOST Plus® or Ensure Plus®

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

Your body uses calories and protein for fuel to maintain and repair your body tissues. A high-calorie/high-protein diet can help keep your body strong during your treatment. The types of foods and textures of your diet may change throughout treatment and even after you have completed treatment. You may need to choose soft, moist foods or a liquid diet to ease side effects of your treatment.

<i>High-Calorie Foods</i>	<i>Healthy Menu Ideas</i>
Butter, margarine, cream cheese or vegetable oils	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spread on soft breads or pastries • Melt on potatoes, rice, soft pasta, hot cereals or soft-cooked vegetables
Heavy whipping cream or sour cream	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add to mashed potatoes, pureed soups, desserts or eggs
Avocado	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Garnish cream- or bean-based soup • Blend into a smoothie or shake • Top scrambled eggs or omelets
Creamy peanut butter or other smooth nut butter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mix into smoothies or shakes • Spread on bananas
Ice cream (dairy or non-dairy milk)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blend with a liquid nutrition supplement and your favorite fruit for a high-calorie shake • Choose premium types that have more calories or add toppings like whipped cream
Mayonnaise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add extra to chicken, tuna, egg or potato salad
Canned coconut milk or canned coconut cream	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add to soups, desserts, hot cereals, pudding, shakes or smoothies.

<i>High-Protein Foods</i>	<i>Healthy Menu Ideas</i>
Eggs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make omelets or scrambled eggs with extra cheese • Use to make custards, quiches, soufflés or egg salad
Milk, high-protein milk or soy milk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use in place of water in hot cereals, hot cocoa or soups • Blend with fruit and yogurt to make smoothies
Yogurt (including Greek and Icelandic types)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make a parfait by topping with fruit or gelatin • Garnish cream or bean soups • Mix into sauces, dressings and dips
Cottage cheese or ricotta	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eat with fruit • Add to pasta dishes, potatoes or casseroles • Fold into pancake batter or desserts
Tofu	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use in place of eggs for a breakfast scramble • Blend into soups, sauces, smoothies or shakes. • Can be used in desserts such as chocolate mousse

Beans or lentils	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Puree to thicken soups • Top refried or mashed beans with cheese, avocado and sour cream
Canned tuna, crab or salmon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mix with extra mayonnaise or yogurt (for softer texture and more moisture) • Make patties or croquettes
Ground beef, pork or poultry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make meatloaf or meatballs • Use in recipes with sauces or gravy such as stews and casseroles.

Fortified milk

Fortified milk can also increase the calories and protein in your diet. You can use it in place of milk in any recipe. There are also a variety of high-protein milk options at the grocery store. You can use them when making:

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

Homemade Fortified Milk	
Mix together: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 cup dry milk powder • 1 quart regular milk 	For a non-dairy option, mix together: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 cup non-dairy milk (almond or soy milk) • 1 scoop protein powder

Sample recipe

Peanut butter and banana smoothie

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

Combine ingredients in a blender; blend until desired consistency. Pour into a glass. For a cool treat, add ice cream or frozen yogurt to boost calories.

Sample 1-day menu

Breakfast	Morning snack
<p>Oatmeal or other hot cereal made with fortified milk or high-protein milk</p> <p>Mix in creamy nut butter, butter, vegetable oil-based margarine, coconut cream, applesauce, apple butter, fruit preserves or soft banana</p>	<p>Whole milk plain yogurt with fresh or canned peaches and honey</p>
Lunch	Afternoon snack
<p>Lentil soup (puree in blender if desired)</p> <p>Soft bread and butter for dipping</p> <p>Cottage cheese with pears</p>	<p>High-calorie, protein-dense nutrition supplement of your choice</p>
Dinner	Evening snack
<p>Meatloaf and mashed potatoes with extra butter and gravy</p> <p>Creamed spinach</p>	<p>Premium ice cream, non-dairy ice cream, pudding or mousse with toppings of your choice</p>

Helpful tips

For dry mouth

- Drink plenty of fluid each day. Flavored waters, fruit nectars, coconut water, flavored milk or nondairy beverages may be more appealing if you have taste changes.
- Lemon drops, sugar-free mints or sugar-free gum may help keep your mouth moist.
- Choose soft, moist foods rather than dry-textured or crunchy foods.
- Add sauces, gravies, applesauce, sour cream, heavy cream or broth to moisten foods.

For sore mouth or throat

- Avoid foods that are acidic, such as orange juice or tomato sauce. Avoid foods that are spicy or salty.
- Eat mild foods such as custards, puddings, creamy soups, milk or non-dairy milk beverages.
- Cold foods may help soothe your mouth and throat.
- Drink smoothies, shakes or liquid nutritional supplements such as BOOST Plus or Ensure Plus if you are unable to eat enough food to meet your needs.
- Use a blender or food processor to make foods smoother and easier to swallow.

For difficulty swallowing

Your physician may refer you to a speech pathologist during treatment. They can provide you with exercises to help you swallow more easily, and cough or choke less when you eat and drink.

Contact a dietitian

A dietitian can help you plan what to eat and drink during your cancer treatment journey. They can also help you:

- Manage your symptoms that may affect your ability or desire to eat
- Improve your recovery time by helping you stay well-nourished and hydrated
- Reduce complications by helping you maintain good nutrition

If you need a feeding tube during your cancer treatment, a dietitian will be available to help you use your tube and learn how to take care of it.

If you have not talked with a dietitian, please call 312.695.0990 to make an appointment. TTY for the hearing impaired, 312.926.6363.