

## Feeling sick (nausea)

Information for Patients and Carers

Feeling sick or being sick is a common symptom of cancer, a side effect of cancer treatment or medications you may be taking. Worry or constipation may also contribute to feeling sick.

If you feel unwell you may find that you are not able to eat regularly or are taking smaller portions at mealtimes. This can make it difficult to maintain your weight and energy levels.

Some practical changes can make it easier to get the nourishment that you need when you feel sick.



### You may find some of these tips helpful when you are feeling sick

#### Fresh air before mealtimes

You could try a short walk, opening a window or standing at an open door to help stimulate your appetite.

#### Avoid being around cooking smells

Ask for support at mealtimes so you don't have to be around food being prepared. If this is not an option, choose cool foods that need minimal preparation e.g. sandwich with cheese and tomato, crackers and nut butter.

Note: if you are receiving a chemotherapy medication called oxaliplatin be mindful that this can cause cold sensitivity – avoid very cold foods.

#### Eat slowly, chew food well

This will give your body time to digest your food and reduce the feeling of fullness which can worsen symptoms.

#### Use ready meals, tinned or packet foods

On days where you find it difficult to prepare a meal, try microwave meals or packet foods to limit time spent preparing food.

#### Cook in batch

Cook larger portions of your favourite meals and freeze individual portions. On days where you find it difficult to prepare a meal you could defrost something already made from the freezer.

#### Try plain or dry foods

- Scone or pancake
- Plain biscuits or sponge cake
- Slice of malt loaf or toast
- Crackers, crisps or breadsticks
- Dry cereal

## Try ginger-flavoured drinks or food

- Ginger biscuits or sponge
- Ginger tea
- Ginger beer – you may prefer to stir out the fizz
- Fresh or ground ginger in cooking

## Remain in an upright position for a short time after taking food or fluid

Sitting upright or propping yourself up with a pillow can help food and drinks pass through your stomach.

## Avoid substances known to irritate your digestive tract

These include smoking, alcohol, fizzy juice, caffeine-containing food and drinks i.e coffee, chocolate and high fat and greasy foods.

For more information and support on cutting down or stopping smoking visit 'Quit Your Way Scotland' at: <https://www.nhsinform.scot/care-support-and-rights/nhs-services/helplines/quit-your-way-scotland>

For advice on limiting your alcohol intake visit 'Drink Aware' at: <https://www.drinkaware.co.uk/>

## Avoid Smoking

Amongst other risks, smoking changes the way you taste and smell. It alters the blood supply to your taste buds affecting the way they work. Your taste buds can recover if you stop smoking.

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## If you have a small appetite or are losing weight try some of these tips to increase your energy and protein intake:

### Choose smaller portions

- Eat and drink smaller portions. Use a side plate for your meals; you may find this more appealing.

### Snack regularly throughout the day

- Eat and drink every 2-3 hours to help you get the nourishment that you need. A drink high in calories or a milky pudding can count as a snack.

### Choose full-fat varieties and avoid low-fat or reduced-fat products

- Milk, yoghurt, mayonnaise, custard

### Add a high calorie topping to toast, bread, crackers or biscuits

- Try honey, chocolate spread, nut butter, jam, mashed banana/avocado or cream cheese.

### Choose drinks high in calories

- Milkshake or smoothie
- Hot chocolate (made with full-cream milk and topped with cream and marshmallows)
- Malted drink
- Glass of milk or lassi
- Fruit juice – dilute with water if the acidity worsens symptoms
- Glass of milk/lassi/sweetened soya milk
- Milky tea/coffee or bubble tea

These suggestions can be used alongside any anti-sickness medication you are prescribed. You could consider taking anti-sickness medication 30 minutes before a meal or a snack to give your medication time to work before you eat or drink.

Contact your doctor, nurse or pharmacist if:

- you don't have anti-sickness medication prescribed but your symptoms are troublesome.
- the medication you are prescribed does not settle your symptoms.
- if you have any problems taking the medication.
- you are being sick and are not able to drink enough fluids.