

# Eating well before, during and after a stem cell transplant

Nutrition and Dietetics

Information for Patients

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**This booklet is for patients preparing for a stem cell transplant.**

## Why is eating important?

Eating well before, during, and after your hospital stay is very important. This will help keep you strong. It can help you get better faster after your transplant.

The treatment can make it harder to eat and drink. This can cause you to lose weight and muscle. Eating enough food gives your body the energy it needs. It can help stop the muscle and weight loss.

## Why do I need to do this before treatment?

Getting stronger before your admission can help your body handle it better. It can lower your chance of:

- getting an infection
- spending more time in hospital
- coming back to hospital after you go home

Everyone feels different during treatment. Some people can eat well, but others find it hard. Your body has to work harder during chemotherapy and transplant. If you do not eat enough you might lose muscle and feel weaker.

This booklet will give you ideas for what to eat before you go into hospital, how to eat while you are there, and what to do when you go home to help keep your muscle stable. It also has tips for dealing with side effects that can make eating hard and advice on food safety.

If you have any concerns or would like to know more, please contact the medical team.

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## Preparing you for transplant

Before you come in for your transplant you will need to build up your strength. This is to increase your muscle. We may ask you to do a hand grip strength test. We will check your weight. We will also check your weight history to help monitor your need for specific support with the dietitian.

### To build muscle you need to:

- **Eat and drink enough to meet your body needs.** You need to have enough calories and protein. There is more about how to do this below.
- **Stay active as much as possible.** If you are struggling with moving around, or with any exercise, then please speak to your specialist team. You may be able to see a physiotherapist to support you more.

Here are some ideas for adding extra energy or protein to your diet. You can add similar options to these if you prefer:

- **Fortified milk:** Mix dried milk powder (around 3 tablespoons) in 250ml of full fat milk. Try making it with a pint of milk with 7 tablespoons of milk powder. You can use this throughout the day in drinks or cooking.
- **Nourishing drinks:** Try having hot chocolate (made with milk), malted drink, milkshakes, and yoghurt drinks.
- **Sweet snacks:** Biscuits, muffins, cakes, puddings, energy bars, full fat yoghurt, dried fruit, pancakes, Ice cream, Kulfi, Jalebi, malt loaf.
- **Savoury snacks:** Cheese, Bombay mix, crisps, nuts, eggs, pakora, spring rolls, samosa, pizza, hummus. Try adding cream, butter or cheese to finished meals.
- **Sauces:** mayonnaise, ketchup, cheese sauce or dressings.

We would recommend a “little and often” approach to help with eating more of these foods. Try and include these at most meal times where possible.

## Taking nutritional supplements

You may lose weight or struggle to build your strength with just food before coming in to hospital. You may need high calorie and protein drinks to help. Your GP can prescribe you them through your dietitian or medical team. They come in different styles and flavours. Talk to the team if you think these can help you. Please let the team know of any food allergies, intolerances, dietary preferences or restrictions that you might have. We will need this information before you are admitted.

Some patients may need a feeding tube. This can be before being admitted or right after admission. This may happen if you are:

- struggling at home
- malnourished before admission

We will talk with you before admission to help make the right choice for you. There is more information on page 4 or please speak with your medical team or dietitian.

## How to eat well during your transplant?

We will encourage you to eat and drink the same high-calorie and protein foods you did at home when you are admitted. A dietitian will visit you regularly during your stay. This is to give you more advice and help. This is to make sure you are progressing well with your treatment.

We will give you different menus when you are an admitted. This is to help with food choices and preferences. Because the stay is long, you can suffer from menu and taste tiredness. Please bring in food that you enjoy eating at home. Please make sure this food is safe to eat. The table below tells you which foods are safe to eat. The nursing team can help see which foods are safe on the ward and in the fridge.

	Foods to eat	Foods you should not eat
<b>Dairy products</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All hard pasteurised cheeses (like cheddar).</li> <li>• Soft pasteurised cheeses without rind (like mozzarella, feta, paneer, cream cheese, ricotta, halloumi, goats cheese).</li> <li>• All cheese that is cooked until steaming hot.</li> <li>• All pasteurised milk, yoghurt, cream and ice cream.</li> <li>• All plant based milks.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mould ripened soft cheeses (like brie)</li> <li>• Soft blue cheeses (like gorgonzola, Roquefort)</li> <li>• Cheese/ dairy uncovered at a buffet or deli</li> <li>• Unpasteurised milks and food made from unpasteurised milk (like unpasteurised goats cheese)</li> <li>• Probiotic products (like Kefir, Yakult, Actimel)</li> <li>• Soft serve ice cream</li> </ul>
<b>Meat, poultry, fish and eggs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meat, poultry that is cooked all the way through with no trace of blood or pink colour.</li> <li>• Pasteurised egg products (like shop bought mayonnaise using British Lion eggs).</li> <li>• Eggs that have been cooked all the way through like hard boiled eggs or scrambled eggs.</li> <li>• Well cooked fish, shellfish and crustaceans that are cooked all the way through.</li> <li>• Pre-packaged cooked meats (like ham).</li> <li>• Pasteurised pate in a jar.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Raw or undercooked meat, poultry, fish shellfish.</li> <li>• Raw or undercooked eggs from any egg source.</li> <li>• Any product using raw eggs that is not fully cooked.</li> <li>• Cured or smoked foods (like smoked salmon, Salami) unless cooked.</li> <li>• Sushi</li> <li>• Unpasteurised pate</li> </ul>

	Foods to eat	Foods you should not eat
<b>Fruit and vegetables</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make sure all fruit, vegetables and salad are washed properly (including pre-packaged ready washed salad).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Damaged or bruised fruit and vegetables.</li> <li>• Raw, sprouted seeds</li> </ul>
<b>Other</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Black pepper, herbs and spices in sealed jars.</li> <li>• All sealed packets (like cereals, dried nuts, fruits, biscuits).</li> <li>• Pasteurised or heat treated honey.</li> <li>• Freshly cooked rice.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Black pepper, herbs and spices bought loose from the deli/ farm shops.</li> <li>• Buffet style foods, refill or excessively large packets.</li> <li>• Raw honey and honeycomb (unless cooked).</li> <li>• Avoid ready made rice.</li> </ul>

**Tips:**

- Check 'use by' and 'best before' dates on food.
- Try not to have takeaways when you are home to recover. You can reintroduce these in time. You can talk with your medical team about this.
- Avoid contact between ready to eat/ cooked and raw foods or unwashed vegetables.
- Refrigerator temperature should be between 0°C to 5°C. Keep your freezer temperature below minus 18°C.
- Make sure food is cooked well. The middle of the food should be above 75°C. You can use a cooking thermometer if you want to check this or make sure it is piping hot.
- Wash your hands well and clean worktops often.

If you were taking nutritional supplements at home then you will continue these at hospital. Even if you did not need them at home, we will prescribe them when you are in. The dietitian will review this regularly.

If you get symptoms that effect your eating then we can increase your nutritional supplements. If you cannot eat enough and we cannot increase the nutritional supplements any more, then we may need to use a feeding tube to support you during this time.

There are 2 main types of feeding tube we can give you to help. There is a narrow tube which is placed into your nose and down into your stomach. This is called a nasogastric tube (NG). The other is a tube that can by-pass your stomach, as needed, and go directly into your small bowel, where food is absorbed. This method is called a nasojejunal feeding tube (NJ). You may still be able to eat and drink whilst you have this tube. We will talk with you if/ when you need a tube.

We normally remove the tube when you are feeling better and eating more. How long this is in for can depend on your progress. If you would like more information on feeding tubes then please speak to your medical team or dietitian.

## Common symptoms after treatment

### Mucositis/ sore throat

It is common to get a sore mouth, throat and/or stomach. This can be specific to the chemotherapy. It can make eating and drinking really difficult. The medical team can prescribe medications to help with this. You should:

- **Eat soft foods or have a liquid diet.** You may need a liquids only diet. Or you may need to use nutritional supplements only during this time.
- **Mouthwashes** can help keep your mouth clean. Use a soft toothbrush to not irritate the sore area.
- **Do not eat acidic, spicy or very hot foods.** This can make the area more sore.
- **Drink plenty of fluids.** This is to help with thick saliva and dryness.

### Feeling sick (nausea) and vomiting

You may feel sick at certain times of the day. You might feel sick when you smell or think about food. This is because of the medications you are taking or your chemotherapy. If you have not had a poo recently, this may also be causing you to feel sick. We can increase your anti-sickness medications to help. You can:

- try to have a small snack every 2 to 3 hours. This is so you do not feel full. Follow a little and often approach: try 5 to 6 smaller meals throughout the day.
- eat and drink slowly. Try not to fill up on liquids before eating.
- eating cold foods. This can be easier to eat if smells are off putting. Neutral flavoured foods can be easier to eat like plain pasta or bread. Do not eat spicy, acidic or rich flavours.

### Low appetite

The advice is similar to when you are feeling sick. Eat little and often meals/snacks. Eating softer foods can be easier. Make sure everything you eat is as nourishing as possible (see the high energy and protein list on page 2).

### Tiredness (fatigue)

Fatigue is common. It can affect your eating if you do not have enough energy to make or prepare food. This can be because of your treatment, eating less and the psychological/ emotional effects of cancer care. Your body is needing to work harder so you may get tired more quickly.

- Softer foods need less effort to eat. This can help with tiredness.
- Eat little and often to help minimise tiredness during meal times.
- Use ready meals or frozen meals that are already prepared when you are home. When you are an inpatient, use already portioned snacks to help with eating. If you are struggling with the emotional effects of this treatment please speak with your medical team.



## Changes to your taste

It is common to see your taste change with chemotherapy and antibiotics. Foods you once disliked may be better and foods you liked could taste unpleasant. It is common to get a thick white layer on your tongue when you have a low immune system. This can change your taste. Please tell your medical team if you think you may have this.

- **Metallic taste:** Avoid metal cutlery or tinned foods. Try using wooden or plastic cutlery.
- **Bland/ cardboard taste:** Marinating and using herbs/spices in food. Have stronger foods more often.
- **Unpleasant taste:** Blander foods can help. Regular mouthwashes and sipping through a straw can help. Pineapple can help: use pineapple chunks and chew them slowly.

## Support after your transplant

When you are ready to go home, we may give you nutritional supplements to take at home. Your body needs to heal. We would encourage you to continue the recommended high calorie and protein diet for the first 100 days after your transplant, or until you feel you are maintaining your weight and quality of life .

The dietitian will see you regularly to make sure you are progressing well. Make sure to follow the food safety advice at home for the first 100 days as well.

If you have any question or concerns then please contact your dietitian or medical team.

## Contact Details:

**Hambleton Suite: 0116 258 5124**

**Dietetic Department: 0116 258 5400**

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