

People with lung cancer may have poor appetite, fatigue, taste changes, nausea, sore mouth or throat, and difficulty breathing. These symptoms can make eating and drinking difficult.

It is important to manage your symptoms as best as you can. Eating well and maintaining your weight will help you keep up your energy and strength. It will also help you tolerate your treatment better.

Try the tips below. If you are still having trouble finding food you can tolerate, or if you are losing weight, ask your healthcare team to speak with a BC Cancer Dietitian.

Poor Appetite

- Have small meals and snacks often.
- Eat high calorie, high protein foods. Check out our [High Protein, High Energy Food Choices booklet](#) on our website or ask your health care team for a copy.
- Instead of broth, eat creamy soup. Try Ovaltine instead of coffee or tea. Use dairy milk instead of plant-based milk.
- Eat when your appetite is best. For example, if your appetite is better in the morning, eat your larger meal at breakfast. Have smaller meals and snacks for the rest of the day.

Fatigue

- Use frozen foods or ready to eat meals to make food preparation easier. You can prepare meals ahead of time and keep them frozen. This will help save your energy at meal times.
- Let family or friends make the foods you like. Go out to eat and order small or half portions. Try a meal delivery service.
- Choose fluids or soft foods. These take less effort to chew and swallow.

Taste Changes

- Rinse your mouth with baking soda and water before your meals.
 - Oral Rinse Recipe and Instructions:
 1. Dissolve 1 tsp (5 mL) of baking soda in 2 cups (500 mL) of warm water. Optional: add ½ tsp (2.5 mL) of table salt to make the rinse taste better.
 2. Pour rinse into a container with a lid, like a water bottle. Keep at room temperature.

3. Swish (and gargle, if possible) about 1 tbsp (15 mL) of the oral rinse for 1 minute. Spit out the rinse.

4. Use the oral rinse at least 3-4 times each day: after brushing or flossing, and after eating or drinking nutritional supplements or sports drinks that have a lot of sugar. Use oral rinse until your mouth returns to normal. This may take weeks or months.

- Eat mild tasting foods such as mashed potatoes, bread and butter, hot cereal, rice, plain pasta and milk.
- Marinate bitter or metallic tasting meat in soy sauce or sweet fruit juice.
- If you are currently smoking, we recommend that you quit smoking. This will make food taste better. It may also help you gain weight and tolerate your treatment better.

Difficulty Chewing or Swallowing

- Do not eat foods that are acidic, too hot or cold, spicy, rough or too dry.
- Choose smooth, creamy foods like creamy soups, custard, puddings, dessert tofu, milkshakes, hot cereals and liquid nutrition drink.
- Use pain relief medications 30 minutes before eating, or as prescribed by your health care team. This allows the medications to start working before you eat.
- If you have a dry mouth, eat soft, moist foods such as sandwiches with soft fillings, pasta dishes with extra sauce, stews, soups, omelets or scrambled egg, potato salad, cottage cheese with fruit cocktail and French toast with syrup. Cut the crusts off your bread for easier chewing.
- Drink 8-10 cups of fluid each day. Limit coffee, tea and cola drinks as they may cause more dryness. If possible, choose fluids with calories and protein such as soup and liquid nutrition drink.

Nausea

- Sip fluids often throughout the day. Aim for 8-10 cups of fluid each day. Good choices are ginger ale, lemonade, broth, popsicles, and Jell-O®.
- Eat dry starchy foods every 1-2 hours, as best as you can. Try crackers, toast, breadsticks, dry cereal, rice, or bagels.
- Take your anti-nausea medications as prescribed.

Vitamins

- If you are not able to eat a balanced diet, a multivitamin with minerals may help. Your dietitian can help you choose one, if needed.

If you try these ideas and still cannot eat, or you are losing weight, ask your health care team to refer you to a dietitian.

You can find more information on our website: bccancer.bc.ca/nutrition