



# Eating well with diabetes when you have a poor appetite

A guide for patients with diabetes and their carers

We care, we discover, we teach



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## Christie website

For more information about The Christie and our services, please visit **[www.christie.nhs.uk](http://www.christie.nhs.uk)** or visit the cancer information centre at Withington, Oldham or Salford.

## Introduction

Diabetes is a common life-long health condition. There are 3.3 million people diagnosed with diabetes in the UK. Diabetes is a condition where the amount of glucose (sugar) in your blood is too high because the body cannot use it properly.

Insulin is the hormone produced by the pancreas that allows glucose to enter the body's cells, where it is used as fuel for energy.

Glucose is made when carbohydrates from the diet are broken down by the body (metabolised) and is also produced by the liver.

In the diet, there are two main types of carbohydrate containing foods – starchy foods (which include bread, pasta, potatoes, rice and cereals) and foods containing sugars. These can be divided into foods that contain added sugars, such as cakes, biscuits and chocolate and foods that contain natural sugars, such as fruit and some dairy products.

If you have diabetes, the amount of glucose rises in the blood and you are not able to use this glucose to give you energy. This may be because:

- your pancreas does not produce enough (or any) insulin to help glucose enter your body's cells (Type 1 diabetes)
- the insulin that is produced does not work properly (known as insulin resistance) (Type 2 diabetes)
- you have pancreatic cancer or have had surgery to remove your pancreas (pancreatectomy) which prevents your body being able to produce enough (or any) insulin
- you have an endocrine tumour such as pheochromocytoma or somatostatinomas. As these tumours are rare, if you have any queries regarding this, discuss with your medical team

- you are taking steroids. Steroids can cause blood glucose levels to rise and so if you have diabetes and are taking steroids you should be monitoring your blood glucose levels on a daily basis.

This booklet is designed for patients with diabetes and their relatives who have concerns regarding eating and drinking.

It offers advice on ways to alter your diet at a time when you may be concerned about losing your appetite or losing weight.

Difficulties with eating are often associated with the disease or the side effects of treatment.

It may not always be appropriate to reduce fat, salt and sugar intake for every person with diabetes. Poor oral health, effects of some drugs on the digestive system, limited mobility, and dexterity can all cause discomfort associated with eating.

Fluid intake can be affected which can cause dehydration, particularly during bouts of illness. Poor or irregular eating can often be a cause of hypoglycaemia (hypo).

You may also feel worried about adding foods to your diet that you have been told to avoid in the past.

If your blood glucose levels do rise as a result of changes to the diet, do not panic as glucose lowering medications can be adjusted.

We recommend you follow the advice in this booklet whilst you have difficulties with eating or concerns about weight loss but then gradually return to a more balanced style of eating.

You will also need a review by the diabetes team, therefore please contact your GP or diabetes team if you are concerned about your intake.

We hope this booklet will help you and your carers during your treatment and your recovery.

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## Eating when you don't feel well

### Lost your appetite?

It is very common to lose your appetite when you're having treatment or feeling ill and although you may not feel like eating, we encourage you to eat and drink as much and as often as you are able, in order to give your body the nutrients it needs to help it recover.

- If you find that you are overwhelmed by large meals then eat smaller amounts but try to eat more frequently. Eat little and often, grazing through the day on drinks and snacks.
- Try having your food from a smaller plate as a very full plate of food can feel over facing and put you off eating.
- You could try aiming for 6 small meals or nourishing snacks each day. Look at pages 11-12 to see if they give you some ideas.
- Make the most of the times that you feel most hungry. For example if mornings are best, try having a cooked breakfast.
- You may find softer consistency foods are much easier to manage as they require less effort to chew.
- Make the food you eat as nourishing as possible by enriching it. Pages 7-8 give suggestions on how to do this.

- If you don't feel you can face solid food, then try a nourishing drink and refer to pages 12-13 for some ideas.
- Keep meals simple and let other people help you with the cooking and shopping. You may find it really useful to use ready-made meals or convenience foods at this time.
- Foods such as fruit and vegetables can fill you up so just keep to small portions whilst your appetite is small.
- Try different foods as you may find you like things you don't usually eat.
- Try to relax and enjoy what you eat. Take your time and chew your food well.
- Some people find that a short walk before a meal, or just a few breaths of fresh air, helps give them more of an appetite.

The above changes will have an impact on your diabetes and so it is important to monitor blood glucose levels. If you are on any medication for your diabetes, this may need to be adjusted.

### **Ways to enrich what you eat and drink**

If you have lost weight or your appetite is poor, you may find it helpful to enrich your food and drinks using milk, dairy products and fats. If you have diabetes, it is better to continue to limit sugar where possible, however it is important to eat the foods that you like rather than being too restrictive. For example having a small amount of jam on your toast is better than not eating toast at all.

- If you are struggling with your intake and fancy more sugary foods, monitor your blood glucose levels and if they are becoming higher than usual, discuss with your diabetes team whether your medication can be adjusted to suit your current diet.

- Do not use diabetic products e.g. diabetic sweets or chocolate as too much of these can cause a laxative effect. Instead, if you fancy sugary foods you can have a small amount and monitor your blood glucose levels. You could also try having sweet foods after meals if possible as this may help with glucose control.

Please read the suggestions below to see if they give you some ideas that you might be able to use.

### Milk and dairy:

These can be used to add energy and protein to food, for example:

- use full-fat dairy produce, such as full cream milk\* and full fat yogurt, in place of low fat varieties (yogurts may be labelled 'luxury' or 'thick and creamy' rather than 'light', 'diet' or 'low fat')
- if you prefer, use non-dairy milk alternatives such as soya\*\*, almond, rice or oat milks. Choose full fat varieties and ones that are fortified with vitamins and minerals
- replace cups of tea and glasses of water with milky drinks such as hot chocolate, malted milk and milky coffee – also lattes, cappuccinos and flat whites. Try drinking these between meals and at suppertime
- add milk powder or Complan Original to soups, sauces, milky puddings and custard
- keep a box of grated cheese ready in the fridge and add to sauces, sprinkle onto soup or pasta, add extra to pizza, use to fill sandwiches, have with crackers and butter or mix into mashed potatoes
- add extra paneer cheese, cream or full fat yogurt to curries
- serve cream, yogurt or fromage frais with cereals, puddings and pies or add to soups, sauces and desserts

- use full-cream milk to make low sugar milk jellies, Angel Delight and instant whips
- make fortified milk by mixing 4 tablespoons of milk powder into 1 pint of whole, full fat milk and use whenever you would use ordinary milk

\*full cream milk, or whole milk, has a blue cap

\*\*current evidence advises not more than 2 soya servings (equivalent to around 400mls soya milk) a day

### Fats:

These can be used to add extra energy to food, for example:

- put plenty of butter or margarine on bread, toast, scones, crumpets, malt loaf, tea-cakes, crackers, jacket potatoes, mashed potatoes and vegetables
- use mayonnaise, cream cheese, sour cream, salad cream and salad dressings in sandwiches, in salads, on jacket potatoes or use as a dip
- be generous with the amount of ghee, olive oil, butter or margarine that you use in cooking
- stir cream, full cream yogurt, mascarpone cheese or crème fraîche into soups, sauces, casseroles, cereals or milk puddings
- spread large amounts of peanut butter, full fat cream cheese or avocado on bread, toast, crackers, oat cakes, crumpets, pancakes or pitta bread
- snack on nuts and seeds

## Food ideas

Below are some suggestions for foods you might like to try. Keep the ones that you fancy handy so that you can snack or graze on them whenever you feel hungry.

It is important when you have diabetes to have balanced meals. Meals should consist of foods from the following food groups:

- bread, cereal, potato, pasta or rice, chapatti, cous cous, yam, sweet potato, tortillas
- fruit or vegetables
- meat, fish or alternatives or milk and dairy foods

You should take your diabetes medications with food.

### Savoury snack suggestions:

- crisps
- nuts – peanuts, cashews, pistachios, brazil, walnuts etc.
- savoury popcorn
- tortilla chips or nachos – try eating with guacamole, salsa or soured cream
- prawn crackers
- small sandwiches or rolls – remove the crusts and have with a soft filling such as egg mayonnaise, tuna mayonnaise, cream cheese or peanut butter
- cheese – grated or cubed, also cheese slices, cream cheese and cheese triangles – eaten with crackers, oatcakes or maybe with some toast
- sausage rolls, cocktail sausages, pasties or pork pies
- spring rolls or sesame toast – try dipping into satay sauce
- samosas, pakoras or onion bhajis

- poppadoms with a yogurt based dipping sauce, e.g. raita
- satay
- falafel
- humous or taramasalata with pitta bread or breadsticks
- feta cheese and olives
- chips and mayonnaise, vinegar or tomato sauce
- toast, crumpets or pikelets

#### Sweet snack suggestions:

- a small handful of dried fruit mixtures, e.g. raisins, cranberries, apricots, dates, figs, sultanas
- plain cakes, biscuits or scones
- cereal bars, flapjacks, chewy oat bars
- cereal and milk
- popcorn
- croissants, currant tea-cakes, hot cross buns or malt loaf

#### Breakfast suggestions:

- porridge, or instant oat cereal, made using full cream milk. Try adding in some cream to make even creamier, try topping with stewed fruit to make it sweeter
- cereal or muesli soaked in full cream milk – try topped with a sliced banana
- full fat, Greek or soya yogurt with soft fruits such as banana, strawberries, raspberries or blueberries – or stewed fruit such as apples, rhubarb or apricots
- croissants, pancakes
- buttered toast or bagels with peanut butter or full fat cream cheese. You could also add a small amount of ordinary jam, marmalade or lemon curd spread thinly or choose reduced sugar varieties

- scrambled poached or boiled eggs, also omelette, fried eggs or French toast (bread dipped in beaten egg and fried). It is important to make sure the eggs are cooked all the way through with no runny yolks or whites!
- cheese or baked beans on toast

### Meal suggestions:

- omelettes or frittatas – filled with cheese, ham or mushrooms
- well-cooked eggs – scrambled, poached, boiled or fried – try having with fingers of buttered toast
- beans or tinned spaghetti on toast – topped with grated cheese
- sardines or pilchards on buttered toast
- soup made with beans or lentils and served with croutons and a buttered roll
- casseroles, stews or hotpots made using meat or beans and topped maybe with a dumpling!
- cottage pie, shepherd's pie, lasagne or moussaka – these can also be made using soya mince or Quorn – try topping with extra grated cheese to make it even more nourishing
- spaghetti bolognese or chilli con carne
- fish poached, grilled or fried also fish fingers, fish in batter, fish cakes and fisherman's pie – serve with chips or bread and butter
- cauliflower cheese or macaroni cheese
- korma, tikka masala, channa curry or dahl served with rice, naan bread or chapatti – even tastier if served with brinjal pickle or mango chutney
- thai curry – served with basmati or sticky rice
- meat, fish, tofu or Quorn – stir fried and served with noodles or rice and maybe a stir-fry sauce

- sausages – meat or vegetarian – with mashed potato and onion gravy
- quiches, flans or pies
- pizza – topped with extra cheese
- toasted sandwiches or cheese on toast
- jacket potatoes – try mashing the flesh of the potato with butter and cream and extra cheese

### pudding suggestions:

The puddings listed below will have some added sugars, however, when eaten after a meal it is alright to have a small amount especially when your appetite or intake is poor.

- milky puddings such as custard, rice pudding and semolina (made with full cream milk and artificial sweetener) or reduced sugar tinned milk pudding
- low-sugar instant whips e.g. Angel Delight and milk jelly made with full fat milk
- ice-cream, sorbet or frozen yogurt
- fruit, tinned or fresh, e.g. bananas and peaches – try serving with cream, ice cream, or kulfi

### Ideas for drinks:

These are often easier to manage than solid food. Try:

- hot milky drinks, for example, Horlicks, Ovaltine, hot chocolate (using low-sugar varieties where possible) cocoa, and milky coffees such as latte, cappuccino, flat white etc. You could also add cream to enrich the drinks further
- cold milk shakes with added ice-cream
- cup-a-soups or packet soups – make these up using milk rather than water
- smoothies made with milk or yogurt (after a meal)

- alternative milks (e.g. soya, rice, oat, almond or coconut) – ensure they are calcium enriched
- lassi
- special powdered drinks such as: Complan (Nutricia), Build Up (Nestle) or Recovery (Boots) – can be used to replace a light meal. They are best made with milk and come in a range of sweet and savoury (soup) flavours. They can be bought at most chemists or supermarkets. It's really worth trying a variety to find the ones you enjoy the most

Additionally, there are some special meal replacement drinks that are available on prescription. Ask your doctor or dietitian whether they are appropriate for you.

You may also find it helpful to read The Christie booklet 'Nutritional products – availability of nutritional drinks, powders and puddings' for more ideas, information and suggestions.

## Hypoglycaemia

Hypoglycaemia (hypo) happens when your blood glucose level falls too low (<4mmols/l).

If you manage your diabetes with Metformin/Glucophage or diet then you will not have hypos. If you take other diabetes tablets or insulin, there is a possibility of hypos.

Eating regular meals which contain starchy foods should prevent a hypo. If you do have a hypo:

1. Check blood glucose level to confirm hypo if you are able to do so.
2. Take 3 glucose tablets or a sugary drink e.g. 100mls Lucozade.
3. Have your next meal, if it is due. Otherwise have a starchy snack eg. 2 plain biscuits or a slice of bread.

- If you are experiencing frequent hypoglycaemic episodes please contact your GP, practice nurse or diabetes specialist nurse as your current glucose lowering medications will need to be reviewed.
- If your appetite is very poor or you are being sick try eating very small amounts of starchy food (eg. 1 Weetabix, 1 biscuit, half a slice of toast) every hour. Please monitor blood glucose more frequently during periods of illness or sickness . Do not stop your glucose lowering medication i.e. tablets or insulin. Please seek urgent medical advice either with your GP, practice nurse or diabetes specialist nurse.

### **Treatment days**

For those having treatment as an outpatient, it is possible that you may be at the hospital for several hours, also you may need to attend over a number of days. As a result, you may miss some meals. This could result in low blood glucose levels (hypoglycaemia). You must also bring your blood glucose meter and diabetes medications with you on treatment days.

It is important that you try and avoid skipping any meals so we suggest you come prepared by bringing snacks and drinks with you. Refer to pages 9-10 and 12-13 for some ideas.

If you have been prescribed nutritional supplement drinks, you may find it convenient to put a bottle or carton into your pocket or bag to bring with you.

Alternatively, patients attending The Christie can buy food and drinks from the hospital restaurant (department 19) or from the café close by the Oak Road entrance, should you prefer.

## Eating when you are having treatment

### Dry or sore mouth?

Radiotherapy or chemotherapy can make your mouth very dry or sore. If it becomes difficult to eat, you may find it helpful to:

- take plenty of fluids – we suggest at least 10 to 12 glasses/mugs a day
- keep your mouth fresh and clean – **please ask the nursing staff for advice on mouth care**
- eat soft, moist food such as stews and main meal soups
- add gravies, sauces, butter or mayonnaise to food, to make it more moist
- try dipping biscuits in hot drinks to make them softer
- drink through a straw
- include nourishing drinks and refer to pages 12-13 for more ideas and suggestions

### **If your mouth is dry...**

- ✓ sip drinks frequently, especially with meals
- ✓ suck ice cubes or lollies – try making them with diet lemonade for a change
- ✓ fizzy drinks can make your mouth feel fresher – continue to have low sugar varieties
- ✓ suck strongly flavoured sugar free pastilles or sugar free mints to keep your mouth moist
- ✓ sharp flavours such as lemon or lime may help your mouth produce more saliva, but don't use them if your mouth is sore
- ✓ pineapple slices can be refreshing
- ✓ avoid dry foods such as bread, potatoes, crackers, cold meats, hard boiled eggs and chocolate
- ✓ artificial saliva or pastilles are available – ask your doctor or nurse about this

### **If your mouth is sore...**

Avoid the following as these may hurt or irritate:

- ✗ salty or spicy foods
- ✗ acid fruits and juices – such as oranges, grapefruit, lemon, lime, tomato and also vinegar.
- ✗ coarse or dry foods such as crisps, toast and dry biscuits
- ✗ alcohol
- ✗ food that is very hot or very cold

## Food tastes different?

One of the side-effects of your illness or treatment is that your sense of taste may be affected so that food either loses its flavour or just tastes different. This situation can last for several months, making it difficult to find things to eat and drink, that you enjoy.

Don't forget that your body still needs many nutrients to help it recover from treatment and minimise weight loss.

- Keep your mouth fresh and clean by drinking plenty of fluids and by good mouth care. Ask nursing staff for advice about this, especially if your mouth feels coated.
- If tea or coffee taste unpleasant; consider replacing with no added sugar fruit squash or hot Bovril, Oxo or Marmite.
- **Sharp** flavoured or sugar free fizzy drinks and fruits may help stimulate your taste buds.
- Make use of herbs, spices, tomato sauce, brown sauce, chutney etc. to add flavour, though be careful not to use too many spices if your mouth is sore.
- **Try sucking sugar-free** mints, or sugar free fruit sweets or chewing on sugar-free gum (be aware too many of these can cause a laxative effect if they contain sorbitol).
- **If food tastes bland**, try putting different temperature foods together, such as fruit crumble and ice cream, or different textured foods together such as cottage pie and crisps; or yogurt and crushed nuts.
- You may find you enjoy savoury foods more than sweet ones. If red meat tastes unpleasant, see if blander foods such as fish, chicken, turkey and eggs or dairy produce such as milk, cheese and yogurt, taste better. Pulses such as peas, beans and lentils can also be very useful.

- Soaking or marinating meat in fruit juice or wine before cooking may improve the flavour, as can having salty foods such as crisps, bacon, ham and crackers.
- If however, you are unable to tolerate the taste of savoury foods then try eating more sweet ones instead! It is better to eat something than nothing at all, and if you are eating foods higher in sugar, your diabetes team can advise how to adjust your glucose lowering medications.
- Present food nicely so that you can still enjoy how it looks as well as how it smells. Concentrate on foods you enjoy even if they are different from your usual favourites but don't eat foods that taste unpleasant.
- **Sipping** drinks through a straw can avoid some of the taste buds and may cut down unpleasant tastes.
- If you have a metallic taste in your mouth, try sucking on sugar free mints, chewing on sugar-free gum, eating salty foods or using plastic knives and forks to help overcome it.

## Finding it difficult to swallow?

Radiotherapy near your mouth or throat, and also some types of chemotherapy, can make your throat sore so that it is hard to swallow\*. Concentrate on soft moist foods such as:

### Savoury

- creamy soups and broths
- fish in a soft sauce or fisherman's pie
- cooked pulses and lentils such as baked beans or dhal
- tender stews, casseroles or tagines of meat, chicken, Quorn or tofu
- minced meat or soya mince made into a bolognese sauce, cottage-pie, chilli con carne or curry
- tuna or hard-boiled egg, mashed with mayonnaise

## Sweet

Use low sugar varieties where possible:

- milky puddings such as rice, semolina, sago or custard
  - mousses, yogurt, fromage frais
  - ice-cream or sorbets
  - jelly made with milk or fruit juice
  - porridge or other soft cereals
- ✓ make sure that what you eat is as nourishing as possible (see pages 7-8 for ideas)
  - ✓ eat and drink more frequently
  - ✓ try nourishing drinks between meals
  - ✓ add extra gravy, cream, butter or margarine to make food more moist

\* If you are only able to swallow liquids, please contact a dietitian for more detailed advice as you are likely to require nutritional supplements. Please also contact your diabetes team as adjustments to your glucose lowering medications will need to be made.

## Feeling full?

It is quite common to feel full even after small amounts of food and this can be very uncomfortable:

- ✓ graze on small frequent snacks and drinks rather than eating large meals, (see pages 8-9 and 13 for ideas)
- ✓ take liquids between meals rather than just before, or whilst eating food, as they can fill you up
- ✓ be aware that rich or fatty foods can be more difficult to digest and can therefore leave you feeling full for longer

- ✓ you may find cold food and drinks e.g. yogurts, ice-cream, fruit fool, and iced drinks, easier to manage
- ✓ try to relax when you are eating; eat slowly and chew foods well
- ✓ consider taking a little gentle exercise – such as a short walk – after meals as it can be helpful
- ✓ wind can make you feel very full and bloated. Try avoiding wind producing foods such as peas, beans, lentils, cabbage, cucumber, onions and pickles or any other items that you know make symptoms worse
- ✓ some people find peppermint cordial, peppermint tea or mints helpful for clearing trapped wind

## Feeling sick?

Nausea or sickness can be due to your disease, treatment or medication. If you are experiencing this, talk to your doctor or specialist nurse. They may be able to prescribe anti-sickness medication to help.

Additionally, if you are feeling sick:

- ✓ try salty foods such as crisps, crackers or savoury biscuits; dry foods such as toast, plain cake, plain biscuits (Rich Tea, gingernut, arrowroot etc.) or bland foods such as chicken and eggs
- ✓ avoid foods if they make you feel worse. Examples may include greasy or fried foods; spicy foods or foods with a strong smell
- ✓ eat and drink slowly. You may find a soft diet easier to tolerate as it requires less chewing
- ✓ avoid the smell of food or cooking and be aware that cold foods usually smell less than cooked ones

- ✓ drinks sipped through a straw often taste better
- ✓ asking someone else to prepare food for you may also help
- ✓ try sucking sugar free mints or boiled sweets (be aware too many of these can cause a laxative effect if they contain sorbitol)
- ✓ sometimes ginger – taken as ginger ale, ginger nut biscuits, crystallised ginger or lemon and ginger fruit tea – can be soothing and helpful
- ✓ try a little light exercise or fresh air before eating
- ✓ sit up to eat and don't lie down immediately afterwards
- ✓ avoid going long periods without food. You may find that nibbling frequently on snacks or light meals helps keep the sickness under control

### **If you are being sick:**

If you have diabetes and are being sick you must seek medical advice from your GP, practice nurse or diabetes specialist nurse. Vomiting in a person with diabetes especially type 1 diabetes can be very serious. Please make sure you know how to look after yourself during periods of illness. See sick day rules on the next page.

## **Sick day rules**

When you are sick your blood glucose levels may rise in response to you being sick, even if you are not eating. This may make you feel thirsty and pass urine more frequently, which can make you dehydrated. You may therefore need to increase the dose of your insulin or diabetes medication to combat this.

Here are a few reminders for you to manage your diabetes during periods of sickness:

- Never stop taking your insulin if you have Type 1 Diabetes – don't stop taking your insulin even if you are unable to eat.
- Test your urine/blood for ketones if you have Type 1 diabetes.
- Continue to take your tablets and/or insulin even if you are not eating much.
- Monitor blood glucose 4-6 times daily.
- Drink plenty of non-sugary fluids (4-6 pints per day) between meals to avoid dehydration.
- Refer to the sick day rules that your diabetes team have provided you with and adjust your insulin dose if you have been taught how to do this.
- Seek medical advice if your blood glucose levels are higher than usual, you feel unwell and you are unsure what to do.
- Seek urgent medical advice if you are vomiting and unable to keep any food /fluids down.

## Diarrhoea?

Radiotherapy to the abdomen or pelvis, or chemotherapy sometimes irritates the intestines and causes diarrhoea. If it becomes persistent, please discuss with your doctor or specialist nurse to see if medication may help.

While you have diarrhoea you may find that your symptoms are eased by following a lower fibre diet. Fibre is the part of food that passes through your gut undigested, it is found in whole grains, pulses, vegetables and fruit.

To reduce fibre we suggest you:

- ✓ replace wholemeal, multigrained or seeded bread with white bread
- ✓ replace wholewheat cereals, oat based cereals, porridge and muesli with Rice Krispies, Cornflakes or Special K
- ✓ replace wholemeal biscuits with biscuits made from white flour such as Rich Tea biscuits, shortbread or custard creams
- ✓ avoid nuts and pulses (baked beans, kidney beans, peas and lentils)
- ✓ take only small amounts of fruit and vegetables and avoid eating their skins, pips and seeds

Whilst following a lower fibre diet, you will need to take a complete multi-vitamin and mineral supplement daily – these are available from your local chemist or supermarket. Please look at the FAQs on pages 24-26 for suitable preparations to try.

Some people also find it helpful to cut down on fat by avoiding fried foods, pastries, cream cakes and fatty meat.

If you have diarrhoea it is important to drink enough to replace fluid that is being lost. Aim for a minimum of 10-12 drinks a day to prevent dehydration. Fluids can include milk, milkshakes, soup, fruit juice, squash, fruit tea, herbal tea as well as tea, coffee and water.

At this time you may find it easier to graze through the day, eating small amounts but at frequent intervals.

When you have no more diarrhoea, slowly start reintroducing the foods you have been avoiding. By adding in one new fibre-containing food each day you will find

the foods your body can tolerate without the symptoms returning. Keep reintroducing new foods one at a time, until you have returned to your normal diet.

If you have diabetes and develop diarrhoea, follow the above recommendations, making sure you include lower fibre starchy foods – such as white bread, white rice, pasta, cornflakes, rice crispies, yogurt and milk – at each mealtime and snack. Return to your normal diet once symptoms have resolved. Seek advice from your diabetes team or GP as glucose lowering medications may require adjusting (see sick day rules).

## Constipated?

Constipation may be as a result of disease, treatment or medications. Some of the painkillers can be especially constipating.

At this time, drink plenty of fluids – aiming for at least 10-12 glasses or mugs daily. Also, try taking some gentle exercise, such as walking.

For some people it is advisable to increase the dietary fibre content of their diet, for others they may need to decrease it. Please speak with your doctor for advice on what is appropriate for you.

If you have been advised to follow a low dietary fibre diet, then refer to The Christie booklet 'Low fibre diet' for advice on what to eat.

## Eating well can mean extra expense

If you have a low income and are finding it hard to manage financially, you may be entitled to benefits or other financial help.

- For benefits advice, contact Maggie's centre on **0161 641 4848** or email [manchester@maggiescentres.org](mailto:manchester@maggiescentres.org)
- Macmillan Cancer Support has an advice line on **0808 808 00 00** or [www.macmillan.org.uk](http://www.macmillan.org.uk)
- Contact your local social services department.

## Frequently asked questions

### *Should I take a vitamin and mineral supplement?*

If you are eating well and eating a variety of foods you are unlikely to need a vitamin and mineral supplement. If, however, your appetite is poor you may need a standard complete multivitamin and mineral preparation to meet your daily needs. Examples of suitable preparations include:

- Centrum
- Boots A-Z multi
- Sanatogen A-Z complete
- Nature's Best A-Z multi

Please be aware that high doses of vitamins and minerals can be harmful and may interfere with your medication and your treatment.

Speak to your doctor, dietitian or pharmacist if you have further queries regarding this.

*Should I be following an alternative diet for treating my cancer?*

There are a number of alternative diets claiming to treat or cure cancer. Some diets recommend avoiding certain foods or taking large doses of vitamins or minerals.

There is no scientific evidence that these diets can make cancers shrink, cure the disease or reduce recurrence.

The effects of such diets on general health are not known as they have not been properly researched. If you are thinking of following a special diet, please discuss this with your consultant, specialist nurse or dietitian.

*I normally follow a healthy diet. My appetite is good and my weight is stable, should I follow the advice in this booklet?*

If you are eating well, eating a variety of foods, and have no weight loss then continue with your normal healthy diet.

If however, you are about to start treatment, your appetite could be affected. It is important to keep your body nourished and prevent weight loss, so follow the guidelines in this booklet, should it become appropriate.

Once you have completed and recovered from your cancer treatment, you may wish to refer to the information booklet 'Eating well following treatment and recovery from cancer' for advice on healthy eating.

*Should I be eating organic foods?*

There is no evidence to suggest that eating organic foods will either help recovery or reduce risk of recurrence.

Organic fruit and vegetables contain the same vitamins and minerals as conventionally grown produce, however, their nutrient levels may be lower by the time they reach the shops, if they have been a long time in transport. Additionally, they can be more expensive to buy.

It is more important to eat fruit and vegetables which are fresh – whether organic or not – rather than ones that have travelled a long distance. Sometimes locally sourced ones can be the freshest and most beneficial of all.

### *Can I take probiotic drinks or live yogurts?*

It is recommended not to have these whilst you are having chemotherapy. For further advice on eating whilst on chemotherapy, see The Christie booklet on chemotherapy.

If you are a haematology/transplant patient, please follow the advice on diet in the booklet 'Welcome to the Palatine ward'.

### *Nutritional supplements are high in sugar, can I have these?*

Although nutritional supplements are high in sugar, you will have been prescribed these because you are not managing enough to eat to meet your nutritional requirements.

Ideally you should take these after a meal. Monitor your blood glucose levels and liaise with with your GP/Practice nurse or diabetes team about making adjustments to your medication if you are concerned.

Sometimes, you may be only able to manage a liquid diet/ supplement drinks to meet your nutritional requirements.

If this is the case, monitor your blood glucose levels during the day and should they rise, discuss with your GP/ Practice nurse or diabetes team about making adjustments to your medication.

We try to ensure that all our information given to patients is accurate, balanced and based on the most up-to-date scientific evidence.

If you would like to have details about the sources used please contact **[patient.information@christie.nhs.uk](mailto:patient.information@christie.nhs.uk)**



Contact The Christie Hotline for urgent support and specialist advice

**The Christie Hotline: 0161 446 3658**

Open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week

Visit the Cancer Information Centre:

The Christie at Withington Tel: 0161 446 8100

The Christie at Oldham Tel: 0161 918 7745

The Christie at Salford Tel: 0161 918 7804

Open Monday to Friday, 10am to 4pm.

Opening times can vary, please ring to check before making a special journey.



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The Christie Patient Information Service  
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