



Eating well with diabetes when you have a poor appetite

A guide for patients and their carers



Contents

Introduction	3
Eating when you don't feel well	5
Ways to enrich what you eat and drink	6
Food ideas	8
Hypoglycaemia.	13
Treatment days.	14
Eating when you are having treatment	14
Food tastes different?.	16
Finding it difficult to swallow?	17
Feeling full?	18
Feeling sick?	19
Sick day rules	20
Diarrhoea?	21
Constipated?	23
Eating well can mean extra expense	23
Frequently asked questions.	24
Christie information	26

Christie website

For more information about The Christie and our services, please visit **www.christie.nhs.uk** or visit the cancer information centres 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.

Department of Nutrition and Dietetics

Tel: 0161 446 3729

Louise Hopewell (diabetes nurse specialist)

Tel: 0799 053 0161

Eating when you don't feel well

Lost your appetite or are losing weight?

It is very common to lose your appetite when you're having treatment or feeling ill. Although you may not feel like eating, we encourage you to eat and drink as much and as often as you are able. This will 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. See pages 9-12 for ideas.
- Try having your food from a smaller plate as a very full plate of food can seem like too much and put you off eating.
- 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 some 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 6-8 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 page 12 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. You could consider using one of the companies that deliver meals directly to your door. Alternatively, do your food shopping on the internet as this can save you time and energy.
- 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'). Avoid bio/probiotic yogurts if you are undergoing chemotherapy or are neutropenic
- 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. See page 12 for more ideas.
- 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 to increase the protein content

Fats:

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

- put plenty of butter, margarine or nut butter on bread, toast, scones, crumpets, malt loaf, tea-cakes, crackers, jacket potatoes, mashed potatoes and vegetables
- use mayonnaise, cream cheese, sour cream, salad cream, hummus, and oil based salad dressings in sandwiches, in salads, on jacket potatoes, on bread 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 or add to cereals or soups
- if you want to reduce the amount of saturated fats while still keeping your calories high, you can swap butter for oil or oil based spreads such as olive oil or vegetable based ones

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/small meal 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 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
- hummus 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, 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 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)
- 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, spaghetti bolognese, chilli con carne, 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
- 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, kulfi or custard

Ideas for drinks

These may be easier to manage than solid food

- 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: Complian (Nutricia), Meritene (Nestlé) or Recovery (Boots). These can 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' for more 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 (e.g. 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 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 food outlets in the foyer area of the main hospital entrance at Oak Road (department 3), 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 10-12 glasses/mugs a day
- keep your mouth fresh and clean – please ask the nursing staff for advice on mouth care
- eat easier to chew foods such as corned beef hash. See The Christie booklet 'Eating a regular, easy to chew diet' for ideas

- add gravies, sauces, butter or mayonnaise to food, to make it more moist
- drink through a straw
- include nourishing drinks and refer to page 12 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 or gum 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
- ✗ chewy, coarse or dry foods such as crisps, toast, dry biscuits, tough meat and hard cereals
- ✗ alcohol
- ✗ food that is very hot or very cold
- ✗ foods that stick to your mouth such as nut butter or pastry

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 crunchy vegetables, 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 if you find that they 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?

With some types of illness or treatment you may experience a sore mouth or swallowing problems. This can be due to pain, inflammation, oral thrush or due to the position of the tumour e.g. oesophageal cancer. In this case you may find that foods that are easy to chew are more comfortable and manageable.

Sometimes the timing and co-ordination of the swallow may be affected. If you experience any of the following symptoms, then you may have a swallowing difficulty:

- coughing on swallowing food or fluids
- difficulty breathing after eating or drinking

- wet or gurgly voice after eating or drinking
- pocketing food in mouth
- unexplained chest infections

You must inform a member of your medical team if you experience these, as you may require a referral to the speech and language therapists to assess the safety of your swallow. They will advise you on the safest texture of diet and fluids.

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 9-10 and 12 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 can be 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, sugar-free mints 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
- ✓ 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, gingernut 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 below.

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?

Diarrhoea can be due to your treatment, medication, illness or infection. If you are experiencing diarrhoea, discuss this with your doctor or specialist nurse to identify the cause and to see if you require any medication.

Fluids

It is important to drink plenty of fluids to replace any lost and to avoid becoming dehydrated. Check for signs of dehydration (passing less urine or passing small amounts of dark urine). If this persists please speak to your doctor. As a guide, aim for a minimum of 10-12 drinks (2 litres) per day.

Fluids can be:

- water
- coffee, tea, herbal tea, fruit tea
- squash, cordials, diluted fruit juice
- milk, milky drinks, milkshakes, milk alternatives*
- clear soups, Oxo, Bovril

*Some people may find milk may make their diarrhoea worse due to the lactose it contains. You can choose lactose-free milk or milk alternatives such as soya, rice or nut milks instead.

Tips

- Try to eat little and often.
- Chew your food slowly.
- Some foods may make it worse such as those containing caffeine, alcohol, spicy foods, greasy or fried foods, nuts and seeds.

There is little evidence for reducing the fibre content in your diet. Try to continue eating your normal diet.

If you have diabetes and develop diarrhoea, follow the above recommendations, making sure you include starchy foods 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 page 20.

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. 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, and if you require laxatives.

If you have been advised to follow a low dietary fibre diet, then refer to The Christie booklet 'Eating well when following a 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**
- Macmillan Cancer Support has an advice line Call **0808 808 00 00** or visit **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 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.

How can I improve my food safety and hygiene?

Keep yourself safe and healthy by taking extra precautions with your food preparation. Keep things clean, wash your hands before and after food preparation using hot, soapy water. Avoid unpasteurised dairy produce and raw or undercooked meat, poultry, eggs and seafood.

Can I take probiotic drinks or live yogurts?

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

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

Christie information

Further information booklets include:

- **Nutritional products**

Describes all the special nutritional products available to help people when eating is difficult.

- **Eating a regular, easy to chew diet**

For patients experiencing pain on swallowing or difficulty eating a normal, textured diet.

- **Eating well when following a low fibre diet**

Your doctor may suggest that you need to follow a low fibre diet while you are having treatment. This booklet lists the foods you are advised to avoid and suggests suitable alternatives.

- **Eating well following treatment and recovery from cancer**

Offers advice on eating healthily once you have finished and recovered from your cancer treatment.

These booklets are free to patients attending The Christie. If you would like a copy of any booklets, please ask the ward staff. If you are an outpatient please ask your clinic nurse or visit the cancer information centre.

If you need information in a different format, such as easy read, large print, BSL, braille, email, SMS text or other communication support, please tell your ward or clinic nurse.

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**

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 **0161 446 8100**

The Christie at Oldham **0161 918 7745**

The Christie at Salford **0161 918 7804**

Open Monday to Friday, 10am – 4pm.

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

The Christie NHS Foundation Trust

Wilmslow Road
Manchester M20 4BX

0161 446 3000
www.christie.nhs.uk

The Christie Patient Information Service
February 2019 – Review February 2022

