

Cancer Answers

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General Dietary Guidelines

excerpted from Chapter two of my book "A Woman's Cancer Journey Primer"

No matter what kind of cancer you have it is important to concentrate on giving your body the highest quality food possible. Your body is in a deadly fight and organic, natural and chemical-free food will help you win. Protein (and perhaps food in general) is not going to taste good to some of you during treatment. Both chemotherapy and radiation can cause this. Combating nausea in addition to these "taste changes" can become quite a challenge for getting the nutrition you need to stay strong and fight your way back to complete health.

Here are some practical suggestions, general guidelines and specific steps for eating well-balanced meals during your journey.

1. Recruit a family member or friend who can organize others who are willing to make meals for you (and your family, if applicable).
2. Taste aversions may be associated with chemo treatments (this is usually not the case with radiation treatments) – so do not eat your favorite foods on a day when you receive chemotherapy
3. Keep a simple food journal to keep track of what tastes good and what doesn't even **sound** good. Also track what makes things taste better or worse than they normally do.
4. Eat in a relaxed setting, whenever possible, and keep conversations light and fun.
5. If you can tolerate (and you crave) highly seasoned foods...let yourself have them on a regular basis.
6. Herbs and spices may help stimulate your taste buds. Additionally, grapefruit and other acidic foods may stimulate them. (Do not eat acidic foods if they irritate your mouth.)
7. Try out different food textures to see which ones you like the most. Crunchy, creamy, crispy and soft are some of your choices.
8. Whey based protein powders are generally well tolerated. Fruit shakes using these protein powders are a relatively easy way to get the protein you need without sitting down to an entire meal that may not appeal to you.
9. If water does not taste good to you purchase flavored water or try adding 1 ounce of cranberry juice to 8 ounces of water. This will encourage you to drink enough water.
10. The most important thing for you to do is find simple, nutritious foods that work for you. Although it would be ideal to eat a well-balanced diet every day, you may be unable to do that because of your lack of appetite and/or how flavors of food change during treatment. For example, if you find that potatoes only taste good scalloped; make certain you eat them that way. They are an excellent source of potassium, and you will eat them if they taste good. This is not a time to follow the strictest of nutritional and caloric guidelines – because some nutrition is better than no nutrition! Natural ice cream has nutritional value in the form of protein and calcium – so eat it occasionally if you crave it and do not feel guilty.

Specific Dietary Advice

If Foods Taste Too Sweet

1. Brew a cup of *Gymnema Sylvestra*, an herbal tea, just prior to eating. It will deaden your "sweet" taste buds for about twenty minutes. Hold each sip in your mouth several seconds. For the maximum result, the cup should take five minutes to finish.
2. You might tolerate fruit juices or other sweet drinks better when diluted with water or milk, depending on the drink.
3. Substituting a vegetable serving for a fruit serving from time to time is generally okay...but check with your doctor.

If Foods Taste Too Bitter

1. Add a little honey to foods and drinks. You might also try stevia. It is available in packets for individual servings. Stevia is very sweet, so be cautious.
2. Meat will taste less bitter when eaten at cold or at room temperature.
3. Meat, chicken, fish, eggs and dairy products may taste better when prepared in casseroles.
4. Try marinating foods. Choose from sweet, salty, tangy or spicy marinades.
5. Eat more sweet fruits.

If All Food Just Does Not Taste Right

1. Munch on pretzels. Choose other starchy foods like bread, potatoes, pasta and rice. Add butter and other fatty substances sparingly to these foods because the fat may negate the benefit.
2. Bland foods generally cannot taste "off" because they do not have much taste to begin with! In this category are eggs, mild cheeses (including cottage cheese), tapioca, hot cereals and peanut butter.

ONE LAST TIP: Make a list of natural, nutritious snack foods that taste good enough to eat regularly. Keep them easily accessible in the house, at work or in your purse.

...ENJOY trying new foods and flavors!