

Make Every Bite Count

What can I eat if my appetite is low?

When you are in treatment, it can be difficult to eat enough of the foods you need. You might be nauseous, feel full quickly, have difficulty swallowing, or have a low appetite. There are many ways to increase your calories without feeling overwhelmed by the amount of food you need to eat.



Why is eating important now?

You need to nourish healthy cells with nutrients to help your body fight cancer. Your nutritional requirements, including calorie and protein needs, may increase as a result of having cancer and/or your cancer treatment. In order to maintain your weight, muscle mass, and vitamin and mineral levels, it is important to get enough calories in your diet. Here are some high-calorie whole food suggestions:

Food	Serving size	Calories
Avocados	¼ medium	70
Butter	1 tablespoon	100
Canned coconut milk	1/3 cup	140
Cream cheese	2 tablespoons	100
Dates	¼ cup	120
Eggs	1 egg	75
Grapeseed oil	1 tablespoon	120
Grated cheese	2 tablespoons	60
Hummus	2 tablespoons	50
Mayonnaise	2 tablespoons	180
Nuts/seeds	2 tablespoons	100
Olive oil	2 tablespoons	240
Olives	5 olives	50
Peanut butter	2 tablespoons	200
Pesto	2 tablespoons	100
Tahini	2 tablespoons	170

What are some other food suggestions to increase calories?

Fats, condiments, spreads

- Canned coconut milk: 1 cup has twice as many calories as whole milk; add to soups and smoothies.
- Avocados: Add to toast, soups and smoothies.
- Olive oil: Cook with, use on salads, and drizzle over vegetables, pasta, grains, and meats.
- Olives: Eat alone or add to salads, pasta, vegetables, and casseroles.
- Butter: Melt on vegetables or hot cereals. Mix with herbs to put on meat or seafood dishes.
- Peanut butter or other nut butters: Spread on bread, eat with fruit, mix into smoothies, or use in sauce.
- Tahini (ground sesame seeds): Mix with water, lemon juice, and salt; drizzle on salads or roasted vegetables.

Vegetables and fruit

- Juice, nectars and fruits: Blend into shakes or smoothies.
- Dried fruits: Add to salads, cooked vegetables, hot or cold cereal, or eat as a snack.
- Fruits: Add cream, half-and-half, whole milk or maple syrup to fresh, canned, or frozen fruits.
- Vegetables: Mix butter or cheese with vegetables before serving or while baking/cooking.

Meat, eggs, legumes

- Beef, chicken, pork, fish: Chop and add into soups, scrambled eggs, vegetables, baked potatoes, salads and casseroles
- Eggs: Try hard boiling to crumble over salads, vegetables, or casseroles; eat deviled eggs or egg custards as a snack.
- Beans or dried peas: Add beans to salads or soups. Use hummus in a sandwich, on a cracker or with some vegetables.

Dairy

- Whole milk: Add calories to whole milk by mixing in half-and-half or instant dry milk powder (3 tablespoons= 90 calories). Add to smoothies/shakes or use in cooking.
- Ice cream, sorbets: Make sundaes, milkshakes, or ice cream cookie sandwiches.
- Whole milk yogurt: Use fruit-flavored yogurt on pancakes, waffles, cereal, or as a fruit dip.
- Cheese: Sprinkle cheese on salads, vegetables, toast, sandwiches, soups or casseroles.
- Cottage cheese: Add to casseroles, scrambled eggs, or stuff in pasta shells.

What if I don't want to cook?

- **Canned or boxed soup:** Try adding extra nutrients/calories with frozen vegetables, beans, potatoes, pasta, finely chopped meat/chicken, olive oil or additional milk for a cream-based soup.
- **Sauces:** Add sauces to pastas or vegetables. There are many sauces available in the grocery store aisles, like alfredo sauce, that can add 125 calories in ½ cup. Other sauces include cheese, peanut, curry, creamy tomato and pesto.
- **Frozen entrées:** Shepherd's pie, pot pies, quiches and other casserole-type dishes are high-calorie meals in small packages. Most of these are soft and easy to swallow.
- **Pudding/yogurt:** Use coconut milk in place of milk to make a container of pudding. Add canned fruit to yogurt.
- **Prepared smoothies:** Many smoothies can be found at your local grocery store if you do not want to mix your own. Make sure they are pasteurized if you are neutropenic.
- **Peanut butter and jelly:** There are 380 calories in this classic sandwich. Put in some sliced banana for some added nutrients!
- **Try a tuna, egg, or chicken salad sandwich.**

Recipes

Coconut Milk Rice Pudding

- 16 oz can coconut milk (not light)
- 1 ½ cups cooked rice (brown or white)
- Sweetener to taste (suggestions: honey, maple syrup, agave syrup, etc.)
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract

Heat the coconut milk in a saucepot, over medium heat, until it comes to a simmer. Add sweetener and stir until dissolved. Add the cooked rice and heat through. Simmer until it thickens but don't allow it to become too dry; the rice will continue to absorb the milk as it cools. Take off heat and stir in the vanilla. Serve warm or chilled. Makes 4 (1/2 cup) servings; 250 calories, 2grams protein, 1 gram of fiber (white rice) per serving.

The Basic Smoothie

- 1 banana
- 1 cup frozen fruit
- 8 oz plain yogurt

Directions: combine ingredients in a blender and blend until smooth. Makes one serving: 300 calories; 14 grams protein; 6 grams fiber

This education resource was intended to be given as a part of a nutrition consult by a Fred Hutchinson Cancer Center dietitian. Questions? Ask a Fred Hutch dietitian at nutrition@seattlecca.org.