



ALCHEMY
IN MOTION

Factsheet:

Cancer and Nutrition

Nutrition plays a vital role during and after cancer treatment, helping to manage side effects and supporting overall health, especially for those experiencing conditions like malnutrition and lymphedema. Good nutrition helps maintain strength, heal tissues, and fight infection while also addressing the adverse symptoms that can arise from cancer therapies.

How Cancer Treatments Can Affect Nutrition

Cancer treatments such as surgery, chemotherapy, radiotherapy, hormone therapy, immunotherapy and steroids can lead to side effects that directly impact nutritional status.

- **Loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, and taste changes:** These reduce food intake and can cause weight loss or malnutrition/undernutrition.
- **Dry mouth, mouth sores, difficulty chewing or swallowing:** These often occur after radiotherapy or some chemotherapy medications, affecting food intake and choices.
- **Constipation, diarrhea, reflux, or altered digestion:** Treatments may disturb gastrointestinal function, requiring careful diet modifications.
- **Fatigue and lowered immunity:** Poor nutrition can exacerbate these symptoms, slow recovery and increase infection risk.
- **Increase in appetite and undesired weight gain:** This can occur alongside steroid medications, some hormone therapies, and certain chemotherapy drugs. These treatments can cause hunger, cravings for high-calorie foods, and fluid retention, that can all contribute to weight gain.
- **Lymphedema and associated swelling, discomfort, and restricted mobility:** Lymphedema may result from cancer treatments and can contribute to unintended weight changes, most commonly weight gain and muscle loss.

Understanding Malnutrition and Cancer

Malnutrition is a common concern for people with cancer, and can affect anyone regardless of their weight, shape, or size. It can develop due to cancer itself, treatment side effects, emotional stress, or increased metabolic needs.

Signs of malnutrition include unintentional weight loss, eating less than usual, increased fullness sensation, mouth or throat pain, difficulty chewing or swallowing, taste changes,

nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, constipation, and general fatigue. People may feel weak, find daily tasks more tiring, need to adjust their belt size or clothing size, or experience reduced muscle strength and increased risk of infection.

Malnutrition can happen at any stage of the cancer journey and increases the risk of treatment side effects, infections, longer hospital stays, muscle loss, slower wound healing, and reduced effectiveness of cancer therapies.

If you notice any of these signs, speak with your dietitian or healthcare team. Early nutrition support can make a big difference.

Eating Well with Lymphedema

Lymphedema is common in cancer survivors, especially post-surgery or radiation. Lymphedema can cause swelling, discomfort, and limited mobility, which can make shopping, preparing, and consuming healthy meals more difficult. This can result in reduced intake, change in meal habits or food choices that are less nutritious.

Chronic inflammation due to lymphedema raises the body's nutritional requirements and people with lymphedema are at a higher risk of undesired weight changes (often weight gain and muscle loss), which can further impair lymphatic function.

Getting nutrition guidance from an accredited practising dietitian can empower you to make nourishing choices that ease symptoms, fit your lifestyle, and support long term lymphatic health.

Nutrition Strategies for Cancer Care

Every person's journey through cancer treatment is unique. Side effects can vary widely, and the combination of challenges differs from one individual to another. Pre-existing health conditions and personal dietary preferences also play an important role in shaping nutritional needs.

Managing body weight, inflammation, and nutrient intake is vital not only for controlling symptoms but also for supporting recovery during and after treatment.

A balanced diet helps to:

- Manage treatment-related side effects
- Reduce the risk and impact of malnutrition
- Support lymphedema management by strengthening the immune system, promoting tissue healing, and reducing inflammation

Working with a dietitian is highly recommended. At Alchemy in Motion, our dietitian develops tailored nutrition plans to suit individual symptoms, health risks, and personal circumstances.

Take the next step in your journey? **Book a consultation today** to receive practical, compassionate support tailored to your stage of life and unique needs.