



## **A Guide to Eating Well with a Small Appetite**

**Practical tips and support for  
patients and carers**

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## Introduction

We understand it is hard to be enthusiastic about preparing food and eating well when your appetite is poor, and you are feeling fatigued after having a serious illness. By eating as well as you can, you are giving your body the energy and nutrients it needs to help you recover more quickly.

This booklet is designed to give you practical support if:

- your appetite is poor, and you are not eating as well as usual.
- you require a high energy / high protein diet to help regain weight, muscle strength, and maintain your energy levels.

### **The aim is for you to:**

- Try to enjoy your food more.
- Eat regular meals and snacks (e.g. three small meals and two extra snacks per day).
- Add extra calories and protein to foods (food fortification).
- Try to have a variety of foods so that you don't miss out on essential nutrients including vitamins and minerals.
- Avoid choosing low fat, low calorie or 'diet' foods and instead opt for the high calorie, high protein versions.
- Avoid low calorie or 'diet' drinks and instead try some homemade nourishing drinks.
- Try some energy saving ideas so that you can pace your activities and preserve your energy levels.

## Fortifying foods

If your appetite is poor and you are not eating as well as normal, the following tips may help you to get more calories (energy) without necessarily having to eat more quantities of food.

You can fortify foods in the following ways:

### Fortified milk:

- Add 4 tablespoons of skimmed milk powder (e.g. Marvel, supermarket own brand) to a pint of full fat milk.
- Use this in place of your ordinary milk, e.g. on breakfast cereal, in milky drinks, custard and mashed potato.
- Store in the fridge and use within 24 hours.
- A more detailed step by step guide for how to make up fortified milk is available at:

<https://www.buckinghamshireccg.nhs.uk/public/your-services/your-health-services/care-homes/nutrition/>

### Savoury foods:

- **Soups:** add cream, grated cheese, milk powder, evaporated milk, puréed beans or lentils, ground nuts, croutons.
- **Sauces:** add butter or margarine, cream, full fat natural yoghurt, grated cheese, ground nuts.
- **Mashed potato:** add cream, butter or margarine or olive oil, grated cheese, full fat mayonnaise or salad cream.
- **Vegetables:** add butter, margarine or olive oil, grated cheese, full fat natural yoghurt, full fat mayonnaise.

## Fortifying foods

### Sweeter foods:

- **Puddings i.e. sponge, crumble, pies:** serve with custard, full fat yoghurt, cream, fromage frais or evaporated milk. Use ice-cream, sorbets, and nuts for extra toppings.
- **Breakfast cereals or porridge:** serve with fortified milk, evaporated milk, full fat yoghurt or cream. Use sugar, honey, golden syrup, puréed fruit and nuts for extra toppings.
- **Toast, crumpets, toasted tea cakes, muffins etc:** spread liberally with butter / full fat margarine, chocolate spread, lemon curd, cream cheese, jam, marmalade, peanut / almond nut butter.
- **Milky puddings:** use full cream milk or evaporated milk to make milk jellies, Angel Delight and instant whips.
- **Milky drinks:** use fortified or evaporated milk to make up your favourite milky drink e.g. hot chocolate, malted milk or cappuccino.

### Non-dairy milk alternatives:

If you prefer to use non-dairy milk alternatives, good options are soya, almond, and oat milks. Choose full fat, non-organic varieties that are fortified with vitamins and minerals.

## Meal ideas

### Breakfast

- Cereal or muesli with full cream or fortified milk. Add sugar, honey or sliced banana.
- Porridge made with full cream or fortified milk. Add golden syrup or dried fruit as a topping.
- Bread, toast or croissant with butter and jam, chocolate spread or peanut butter.
- Scrambled egg or baked beans on toast.
- Full fat Greek or soya yoghurt with honey and soft or stewed fruit as a topping.

### Lighter Meals

- Fortified soup with bread & butter.
- Toast with beans, cheese, egg, ravioli or tinned spaghetti.
- Sandwiches with meat, cheese, fish or egg.
- Jacket potato with cheese, beans or tuna.
- Pizza slices with a small salad.

### Main Meals

- Include a protein source e.g. meat, fish, egg or pulses.
- Include a starchy carbohydrate source e.g. potatoes, rice, bread or pasta.
- Add butter or oil to vegetables.
- Add a creamy sauce for extra calories.

### Puddings

- Thick and creamy yoghurts\*  
*\*Arla and Skyr brands produce a high protein range of yoghurts if a lower fat option is preferable.*
- Tinned sponge puddings with cream or ice cream.
- Milky puddings e.g. rice pudding, egg custard, trifle, milk, jelly, crème caramel, crème brûlée, mousses, soya desserts.

## Snack ideas

### Savoury snack suggestions

- cheese & biscuits / crackers / oatcakes.
- toasted crumpets with butter and cheese.
- toasted bagel with butter and cheese.
- pitta bread or breadsticks with humous or taramasalata
- feta cheese & olives.
- finger sandwiches – remove the crusts and have with a soft filling e.g. tuna mayonnaise, cream cheese, peanut butter.
- sausage rolls, cocktail sausages, pork pies (or vegetarian equivalent).
- samosas, pakoras, onion bhajis.
- poppadums with chutney.
- spring rolls or sesame toast – try dipping into sweet chilli sauce.
- crisps / prawn crackers.
- tortilla chips / nachos – try eating with guacamole, salsa or soured cream.
- nuts – peanuts, cashews, pistachios, brazil, walnuts etc.

### Sweet snack suggestions

- thick & creamy yoghurts, mousses, trifles, ice cream.
- cakes, pastries, toasted teacakes, croissants, malt loaf.
- chocolate biscuits or mini chocolate bars.
- cereal bars, flapjacks, chewy oat bars, popcorn.
- dried fruit mixtures e.g. raisins, cranberries, apricots, dates, figs, sultanas.
- boiled sweets, toffees, mints, jelly babies, marshmallows etc.

## Ideas for Drinks

If you are struggling with solid food, you may find some of these drinks easier to manage:

### Milky Drinks:

Use fortified full fat milk to make up the following drinks:

- **Hot milky drinks** - Ovaltine, Horlicks, Milo, Bournvita, hot chocolate, milky coffee. You can also add 1 tablespoon (tbsp) of double cream to hot milky drinks.
- **Cold milk drinks** - milkshakes made with cordials, fruit juice, milkshake syrup or powder. Add a scoop of ice cream. Try fruit smoothies made from fruit blended with full fat milk, ice cream, full fat yoghurts and honey or malt.
- **Savoury drinks** - instant soups, Bovril or Marmite made up with full fat or fortified milk.
- **Yoghurt drinks or smoothies** - can be purchased or make your own with full fat milk or yoghurt.

## Nourishing Drinks

Here are some easy recipes for homemade nourishing milkshakes & smoothies:

- **Banana Milkshake** - Add 1 banana, ½ pint cold fortified milk, a pinch of cinnamon and 1 tablespoon of double cream to a blender. Blend for 10-15 seconds and serve.
- **Iced Coffee** - Dissolve 2 tablespoons of coffee in a little warm milk. Top up with 1/3 pint of full fat milk, 2 tablespoons

of sugar and 1 scoop of ice cream. Whisk and chill before serving.

- **Milky Moment** - Add 1-2 tablespoons of vanilla ice cream or double cream to 1/3 pint of milk and 1 tablespoon of skimmed milk powder. Add a choice of flavoured milkshake powder, drinking chocolate or pureed fruit/soft fresh fruit.
- **Banana Chocolate Smoothie** - Mix 1 tablespoon of full fat natural yogurt and 1/4 pint of full fat milk together. Add 1 banana and a choice of *either* 1 teaspoon smooth peanut butter or 1/2 tablespoon of chocolate spread. Blend and serve.
- **Fruit Yogurt Drink** - Mix 2 tablespoons of full fat fruit yogurt and 1/4 pint of full fat milk together, add pureed fruit or soft fresh fruit tinned.
- **Mango Milkshake** – Mix 100g of mango pulp, 200ml of full fat milk and 100ml of full fat plain yoghurt (e.g. Greek yoghurt), with a spoon or in a shaker/blender.

**Tip:** You may wish to add 20g vitamin fortified milkshake powder (e.g. Nesquik or Tesco milkshake mix) to your nourishing drink for added vitamin and minerals.

## Supplement Drinks

There are a range of 'over the counter' supplement drinks that are available from most pharmacies and supermarkets. They are available in a range of sweet, savoury and neutral flavours.

**Powdered drinks (to be made up with full fat milk) include:**

*Complan, Meritene and Aymes Retail.*

**Ready to drink versions include:**

*Complan Smoothie, Nurishment and Nurishment Extra.*

**If your food intake and weight has not improved within four weeks and you continue to lose weight, contact your GP who may be able to advise you about nutritional supplement drinks available on prescription or refer you to a dietitian.**

## Frequently Asked Questions

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

If you are struggling with a poor appetite or reduced food intake, you may not be getting all the nutrients you need from your diet and may benefit from taking a multivitamin & mineral supplement.

Choose a product that has approximately 100% RNI (Reference Nutrient Intake) for all nutrients. Suitable options include Sanatogen, Superdrug, Boots or supermarket own brand A-Z multivitamin & mineral supplements. If you struggle to take whole tablets, chewable options are Centrum Fruity Chewables or Superdrug Chewable A-Z.

### **Vitamin D**

Vitamin D works with calcium for healthy bones, muscles and teeth. It is difficult to get enough vitamin D from diet alone - the main source of the vitamin is skin exposure to sunlight during the summer months.

All adults should consider taking 10 mcg per day vitamin D during the winter months. Some at risk groups (e.g. over 65's, people who cover their skin when outside) are recommended to take a daily 10 mcg vitamin D supplement all year round.

If you are concerned you are not getting enough vitamin D, speak to your GP or ask to be seen by a dietitian.

## Helpful hints if your appetite is poor:

- Let someone else do the cooking if you can. The smell may affect your appetite. If you prepare food yourself, use foods that are easy and less energy consuming to prepare.
- Have small frequent meals and snacks every 2 - 3 hours during the day rather than trying to eat three meals.
- Make the most of the times when you do feel hungry, keep snacks handy to nibble on, such as crisps, nuts, biscuits, dried fruit.
- Take a short walk outside in the fresh air or have a small glass of your favourite wine or sherry which may help to stimulate your appetite before a meal.
- Avoid filling yourself up on too much fluid before a meal.
- Eat meals slowly, chew the food well and relax for a while after each meal.
- If cooking is difficult, try ready-prepared meals either from the supermarket or delivered to your home e.g.
  - Wiltshire Farm Foods [www.wiltshirefarmfoods.com](http://www.wiltshirefarmfoods.com) (0800 077 3100)
  - Oakhouse Foods [www.oakhousefoods.co.uk](http://www.oakhousefoods.co.uk) (0845 643 2009)
  - Parsley Box (products don't require freezer space) [www.parsleybox.com](http://www.parsleybox.com) (0800 612 7225)

## Energy saving ideas

Planning ahead, pacing and listening to your body may help to offset tiredness and fatigue that makes daily activities difficult, and may help to manage weight loss.

### Planning ahead

- Try to identify tasks which cause extreme tiredness.
- Ask others for help with daily activities. Plan your day so that you have time to rest and do the things you want to do.
- Spread tasks out over the week.
- Use equipment to help save energy (eg sitting or perching instead of standing).
- Organise tools and materials in the work area (kitchen etc) and store items within easy reach.

### Pacing activities

- The aim of successful pacing of activities is to avoid exhaustion.
- Many activities do not need to be done quickly or all in one go.
- Try taking things more slowly.
- Take planned breaks before you become tired.
- Save some tasks for later in the day or even the next day.
- It is easier to keep some small reserves for the next task than it is to build those reserves after they are depleted (due to exhaustion).

## Listening to your body

When we perform everyday tasks, we tend to be in 'automatic' mode, but this is not very useful to those who have high levels of fatigue and tiredness.

To pace yourself and plan ahead, you can learn to 'hear' what your body is telling you before, during and after activities.

Try looking closely at one task (e.g. shaving, dressing, bathing):

- At what point does the feeling of significant tiredness begin?
- Are there natural breaks in the task?
- Could you sit down to do the activity?
- Is there someone who could help you? (Talk to your GP, District Nurse or Social Worker).

For expert advice and assessment related to pacing and equipment, request referral to an Occupational Therapist.

