

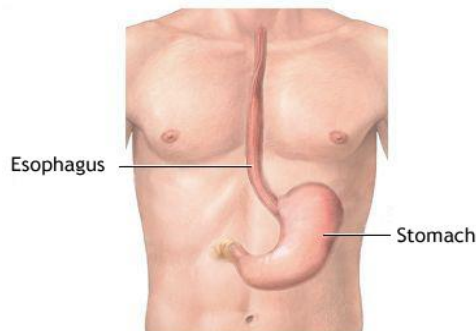
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# Eating Well During Esophageal Cancer Treatment

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## The Importance of Nutrition During Your Cancer Treatment

Esophageal cancer and its treatment (such as chemotherapy, radiation, and surgery) may make it difficult for food to pass into the stomach. During treatment, swallowing may become painful, making it difficult to eat and drink. The amount of nutrition your body needs may be increased during this time. Proper nutrition will help you maintain your weight, strength, and promote healing.



Some common feeding issues during treatment include:

- Loss of appetite
- Dry mouth and throat
- Difficulty swallowing
- Pain with swallowing
- Weight loss
- Acid reflux
- Thick saliva
- Taste changes

### Tips to Help

- Choose high-calorie and high-protein foods.
- Instead of large meals, try to eat 4 to 6 small meals each day.
- Sip liquids throughout the day.
- Ask your dietitian about oral nutrition supplements, or recipes that are easier to swallow.

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- When possible, choose a diet high in plant-based foods. This includes fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and legumes.
  - Eat slowly and chew your food thoroughly.
  - Sit up while eating and remain upright for 2-3 hours after meals.
  - Limit spicy foods, acidic foods and caffeinated beverages



## Helpful Cooking Tips

- Try baking, boiling, and sautéing foods for softer textures.
- Puree your foods. First cook the food as needed and then blend with a small amount of liquid.
- Soften your foods with gravies or sauces.
- Add healthy plant oils to foods to improve texture and add calories (avocado, coconut, olive, grapeseed, flax oil).
- Cook in batches and freeze leftovers for future meals.

## Hydration

It is important to drink water throughout the day to maintain good hydration and recover from chemotherapy and/or radiation therapy. Water should be your main source of hydration. Aim for 64 fluid ounces (8 cups) per day or as directed by your medical team.

To help you increase your fluid intake, try:

- Taking small sips of water throughout the day
- Drinking water after meals
- Drinking diluted fruit or vegetable juice

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- Sip on unsweetened caffeine-free tea
  - Carry a water bottle with you for easy access

## **Foods to Add into Your Diet**

### **High Protein Foods**

Protein will help your body repair itself, aid in recovery time and strengthen your immunity. If you have trouble chewing or swallowing, try strained baby food or pureeing your own meat. Prioritize plant-based protein sources when possible to provide beneficial fibers, vitamins, minerals, and to reduce inflammation.



Examples of high protein foods include:

- Tofu (*plant-based*)
- Mashed or pureed beans (*plant-based*)
- Nuts and nut butters (*plant-based*)
- Pureed or ground skinless turkey or chicken
- Pureed or ground lean red meat (92% lean)
- Flakey fish such as salmon or tuna (mixed with mayo or yogurt, can puree if needed)
- Eggs or egg substitute (scrambled or pureed)
- Cottage cheese
- Yogurt (especially Greek yogurt)

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## Vegetables

Boil, steam, or microwave vegetables until soft and then puree in a blender if needed. You may be able to swallow soft-cooked, finely chopped vegetables as well, but use caution. Consider adding pureed vegetables to creamy soups or smoothies for more variety and extra vitamins and minerals.



Examples of non-starchy vegetables include:

- Leafy greens
- Beets
- Carrots
- Cauliflower
- Broccoli
- Squash
- Cabbage
- Green beans
- Zucchini
- Mushrooms

## Fruit

Choose fresh fruits, baby food fruit or canned fruit (packed in light syrup or natural juice). Puree in a blender, if needed. Some soft or mashed fruits may also be easy to swallow but use caution. Limit fruit juices as they often contain added sugars and lack healthy fiber.

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Examples of soft, easy-to-eat fruit include:

- Applesauce
- Peaches
- Pears
- Blueberries
- Strawberries
- Bananas
- Mangos
- Plums
- Fruit cocktail

## **Milk/Dairy Products**

Dairy products can be a great way to add calories and protein to your diet. Choose full-fat dairy products such as whole milk, whole milk cheeses, and whole milk yogurt. Dairy products make great bases for high-calorie, high-protein smoothies or milkshakes. If you are lactose intolerant or limiting dairy, choose alternative milk products. When choosing alternative dairy products, remember to choose products that provide plenty of protein.

Examples of dairy and dairy-alternative products include:

- Whole milk, soymilk or Lactose-free milk
- Pudding
- Greek yogurt or soy-based yogurt
- Ice cream
- Cheese
- Cream cheese
- Cottage cheese
- Coconut milk (unsweetened canned)
- Kefir

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## Starch

Starches provide a great source of energy for your body. You may be able to tolerate soft-cooked or pureed starches. Choose whole grains (oatmeal, brown rice, whole grain pastas) over refined grains (white rice, white pastas) when possible.



Examples of healthy starches include:

- Cooked cereals (oatmeal, cream of wheat)
- Unsweetened dry cereal (corn flakes, rice cereal) well-moistened with milk
- Potatoes (mashed, boiled, baked)
- Creamed corn
- Whole wheat pasta
- Gluten-free pastas (brown rice, lentil, chickpea)
- Mashed or pureed beans, peas, or lentils

## Nuts & Seeds

Nuts and seeds are high in calories, healthy fats, and protein, and make great snacks or additions to any meal.

Examples of ways to use nuts and seeds include:

- Add nut butters such as peanut butter, almond butter, cashew butter, or sunflower butter to oatmeal and smoothies
- Make chia seed pudding
- Add shaved almonds to oatmeal
- Add ground flaxseed to cooked cereals, smoothies

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## **Meeting Nutrition Needs If You Cannot Eat by Mouth**

If you are struggling to meet your nutritional needs with oral intake alone, speak with your Registered Dietitian Nutritionist (RDN) to see if an oral nutritional supplement may be helpful. If eating by mouth is challenging, your RDN and medical team may work with you on other ways to help you meet your nutritional needs.

### **Please contact your dietitian to meet and discuss your personal nutrition needs during cancer treatment.**

Eating well during treatment will help to support your body before, during, and after cancer treatment. Do not wait until your symptoms result in weight loss or eating problems. Meeting with your RDN will help you follow a personalized nutrition plan specific to your needs and conditions, and help you address nutrition issues before they become severe.