

Loss of Appetite

Nutrition Fact Sheet

Loss of Appetite is when one has a reduced desire to eat, or no desire to eat at all. Continued loss of appetite is of major concern and should be discussed with your doctor and dietitian.

Problems With Loss of Appetite

With continued loss of appetite and decreased food and beverage intake, problems such as malnutrition (loss of nutrients), dehydration, wasting (extreme weight loss), vitamin and mineral deficiencies, diarrhea, and increased risk for opportunistic infections can occur. Weight loss of 5 pounds or more in one week needs to be discussed with your doctor.

Possible Reasons for Loss of Appetite

- Advanced HIV/AIDS and liver disease
- Alcohol consumption
- Anxiety/Stress
- Constipation
- Consumption of sugary beverages
- Delayed stomach emptying
- Depression
- Fatigue
- Hypothyroidism
- Increased viral load
- Infection/Illness
- Infections of the mouth
- Low testosterone level
- Medications/Side effects
- Recreational drugs
- Smoking
- Taste and smell changes
- Use of herbs
- Vitamin & mineral deficiencies

Food Records

Keep daily records of what, how much, and the time of day you eat and drink. Certain patterns or behaviors may appear that interfere with appetite or help with efforts to regain your appetite. Try not to skip meals or snacks; it may be necessary to set a timer to go off every 2-3 hours to remind yourself to eat. A few bites of food is better than none at all.



Ideas to Increase Appetite and Prevent Weight Loss

- Take a walk or do some exercise to work up an appetite
- Invite a friend to eat with you and eat in a pleasant place
- Speak to your doctor about an appetite stimulant
- Eat something every 2-4 hours. Think small amounts, but often.
- Always leave the house with snacks such as trail mix, pieces of fruit, or string cheese
- Make sure to “break the fast” by starting the day with some food
- Avoid drinking liquids with meals or snacks. This can cause early fullness.
- If losing weight, eat foods high in calories such as peanut butter, nuts, seeds, or avocado
- Avoid drinking sugary beverages throughout the day, these can make you feel full
- Prepare and freeze foods when you feel good, to eat when you are not feeling well
- Eat lukewarm or cold foods to avoid strong food odors that may cause you to lose your appetite
- Try cold foods like protein shakes, pudding, yogurt, or smoothies if eating is painful
- Eat in a pleasant setting and invite a friend to eat with you



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Add the following to your meals for extra calories and protein:

- Cheese to toast, tortillas, or crackers
- Hard boiled eggs to salads, casseroles, soups, potatoes, rice, vegetable dishes
- Meat, fish or chicken to soups, casseroles, pasta, omelets or sandwiches
- Nuts, seeds or trail mix to cereal, yogurt, pudding, salads and vegetables
- Beans, lentils and rice in salads, pasta dishes, soups, casseroles and tortillas
- Protein powder, yogurt, dry milk powder, and avocado to smoothies



Medication to Stimulate Appetite

It may be necessary to take a medication to stimulate your appetite. Megesterol acetate (Megace™) and dronabinol (Marinol™) are two drugs that increase appetite. Both of these medications have side effects and/or drug -drug interactions. Discuss them and other options with your medical provider to determine what is appropriate for you.

Medical Marijuana (*Cannabis sativa*)

Medical marijuana has been shown to lessen nausea and increase appetite when smoked. However, there are safety and legal issues regarding marijuana use. California passed Proposition 215, the Compassionate Use Act, legalizing marijuana for medical use. Proposition 215 permits seriously ill Californians to use marijuana, provided they first obtain a doctor's written recommendation.

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