EATING

Important information for you

Maintaining good nutritional health improves your tolerance of cancer treatments as well as your quality of life. Taking charge of your nutrition is part and parcel of your cancer care.

While chemotherapy may alter your sense of taste and lessen your enjoyment of your food, it is at this time that your body has a particular need of energy and of protein to keep your weight steady, preserve your muscles and fight infection. So indulge your fancies and eat what you like.

**However, you should keep to the most varied diet you can, to provide you with**

- **Protein:** meat, fish, eggs, milk products, tofu, pulses
- **Energy:**
  - Starchy or floury foods: pasta, rice, potatoes, polenta, semolina, quinoa, cereal, bread etc.
  - Sugary foods: fruit, sweets, sodas etc.
  - Fatty foods: oil, butter, cream
  - Energy-rich foods: deli meats, cheese, chocolate, dried fruits and nuts, cakes, biscuits, crisps etc.
- **Vitamins, minerals and fibre from fruit and vegetables**
- **Sufficient hydration from water, herb teas, fruit juices** (at least a litre a day is recommended).

The side effects of the different treatments (nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, difficulty swallowing, mucositis, altered sense of taste, fatigue, pain etc.) can wreak havoc with your food intake and lead to a decline in your nutritional health.

**When your immune defences are seriously weakened over a long period, you need to follow a strict, carefully supervised regime so that your diet is not a source of infection. If this is your case, your care team will tell you so and will advise and help you to follow instructions about eating.**
Three possible strategies

1. You can enrich your meals by adding soups, floury foods, ham, cheese, eggs, cream, butter, oil etc.

2. If need be, oral food supplements, rich in protein and in energy can be introduced in the course of the day in the form of drinks, creams, soups etc.

3. If it becomes impossible to eat enough, artificial nutrition support can be provided: enteral feeding by naso-gastric tube (a tube that goes directly to your stomach) or parenteral feeding through a vein (also possible at home).

Some advice

- Drink preferably between meals.
- Try out new dishes. Your sense of taste and smell may change during treatment.
- Drink the food supplements between meals or at bedtime. They are sometimes nicer taken chilled or drunk through a straw.
- Keep up your outdoor exercise as that will stimulate your appetite.
- Break down your meals into smaller more frequent snacks, between-meal nibbles and treats: biscuits, yoghurt, dessert, ice cream, bread and cheese etc.

N.B.

Ligue Suisse contre le cancer brochure, Difficultés alimentaires en cas de cancer [Eating difficulties in cases of cancer]. HUG brochure, Alimentation et cancer [Eating and cancer].