

How to Manage **Lack of Appetite** at Home

This guide will help you understand:

What is lack of appetite?

What causes lack of appetite?

What you can do to help manage your lack of appetite.

When you should talk to your healthcare team.

One:carepath gratefully acknowledges the contributions of the many patients, caregivers and providers that were involved in preparing this Symptom Self-Management Guide.

What is lack of appetite?

Many people with chronic diseases lose their appetite at some point. A lack of appetite is often described as:

- Not feeling hungry,
- Eating less than usual, or
- Feeling full after eating a small amount of food.

The thought of eating food may also make you feel nauseous [*like you might throw up*]. Loss of appetite may also be called anorexia.



Tell your healthcare team if you have a lack of appetite and are finding it difficult to manage.

What causes lack of appetite?

There are many reasons for a lack of appetite, for example being constipated, anxiety, pain, certain medical conditions and sometimes medications or treatments, like chemotherapy.

What you can do to help manage your lack of appetite.

Managing lack of appetite works best when you play an active role.

- Try to figure out if there is a cause for your lack of appetite.
- Is it better or worse at different times?
- What helps or makes it worse?
- You may want to use a symptom diary to record information about your lack of appetite. Tracking this information will help you talk to healthcare team about your lack of appetite.

Physical steps you can try:

- **Medication:** If you take medication for your lack of appetite or nausea, take it as prescribed so your symptoms don't get too bad.
- **Make mealtimes relaxing and enjoyable:** Eat with family and friends, listen to music or watch the TV. Take your time to eat and try new foods that appeal to you.
- **Eat smaller amounts of food more often:** Eat whatever you feel like eating and try to eat every 3-4 hours. Keep snacks handy for when you feel like eating.
- **Make every bite count:** Eat food high in protein and calories. For example, protein shakes, nuts, cheese, Greek or full-fat yogurt, peanut butter and cream soups made with whole milk.
- **Eat food cold or at room temperature:** This will reduce strong tastes and smells and can help if you have nausea.

- **Drink plenty of water:** 30 to 60 minutes before or after meals, instead of with meals, otherwise it can fill you up quickly.
- **Limit or stop:** Alcohol, caffeine, and nicotine to see if your symptoms get better. These can make your lack of appetite worse.

Mental activities you can try:

- **Think positively:** Positive thinking may ease lack of appetite.
- **Distract yourself:** Do something that you enjoy to try and keep yourself mentally busy. For example, crossword puzzles, Sudoku, needlework or video games.

When you should talk to your healthcare team.

Speak with your healthcare team if lack of appetite is a problem for you. Your worries and questions are important to you and them. Your healthcare team may speak to you about the different medications you can take.

- Let them know if you think you're your medical condition or medications are the reason you are
- Let your healthcare team know if a medication is working for you or if you're having side effects. You may have to try a few different ones to know what works best for you.
- Talk to them before taking over-the-counter medication, including vitamins and herbal remedies.

Tips on sharing your symptoms with your healthcare team:

Make some notes about your lack of appetite symptoms and tell your healthcare team about them.

- Has there been a change in your appetite?
- How bad is it?
- When does it happen and how long does it last?
- What makes it better or worse? What have you tried already?
- Make a list of all the medications you are taking including over the counter medications.

Notes: _____

