



Integrative Therapies Program for
Children with Cancer
Herbert Irving Cancer Center, 7th Floor

Created by: Elena Ladas, MS, RD
Debbie Kennedy, PhD(c), CNS
Kara Kelly, MD

COPING WITH LOSS OF APPETITE

General Guidelines That Help:

- Make mealtimes relaxed and calm, do not make them an “event”
- Try eating in different environments. For example, picnic, invite friends over for a party, create activities around food, eat in different areas of the house
- Have smaller and more frequent meals versus three large meals
- Use positive reinforcement to encourage eating, but do not punish bad or no eating
- Have a variety of snack easily accessible
- Have fun preparing foods. Engage your child in this activity. Books and CD’s are available at your local bookstore for helpful ideas.
- Present foods in a child-like fun way. Make sandwiches into interesting shapes or decorate pasta, fruits, breads, and vegetables with interesting toppings.
- Increase the calorie content of the foods your child will eat. Work with a nutritionist to help increase the calories in your child’s diet.
- Liquids can cause early satiety (fullness), limit them at meals
- Cold or room temperature foods may increase intake
- Try taking a walk with your child before meals, this may stimulate appetite
- Try new recipes and foods. Present food in an interesting fashion, mix colors of foods.
- Eat meals backwards for one day. You can increase the calories in your child’s diet if you start with a nutritionally-dense dessert. Top your child’s favorite cake topped with freshly juiced berries and a side of fresh-fruit ice-cream for an added bang!
- Take advantage of holidays.

Foods that could help:

In a child who has lost their appetite, the goal is to get them to eat more and increase the calorie content of the foods that they will eat. Above mentions many ways to stimulate the environment your child is in.

Here are some ideas to increase the calorie content of foods:

- Butter - Add these to sandwiches, pastas, cereals, vegetables, and casseroles.
- Cheese- You can serve cheese in a variety of ways, melted, grated, or in solid form. Add melted cheese to pasta dishes, toast, vegetables, omelets and sandwiches. Grate cheese over casseroles or vegetables. Have cheese and crackers as readily available snacks. Add cream cheese to toast, bagels, and crackers
- Powdered milk can be added to a variety of dishes (in powdered form) to increase the caloric content of foods. Other milk products to add to foods are sour cream and whipped cream. These can be added to puddings, gelatin, jello, custards, pancake & waffle mixtures, muffin & cookie mixtures.
- Salad Dressings- These can be added to salads, but also to meats, vegetables, and some fruits
- Granola- This can add texture and flavor to bland foods. Add to breakfast cereals, top yogurt, ice cream, and fruits, add it to muffin, cookie, or bread mixtures, mix it with dried fruits and nuts.
- Make cream soups instead of clear brothy soups

- Add jelly, honey, peanut butter, hummus, and a variety of other dips/condiments to any dish to add flavor, texture, and calories.

Herbs/Complementary Therapies that may help:

**The use of herbs is not recommended. The information is provided because many have inquired about these particular agents. Although, the following herbs have not been found to be harmful in small studies, there is still limited information available about their use in children in conjunction with chemotherapy. It is imperative that the use of herbs be discussed with your child's physician before proceeding with any of these therapies.*

- Digestive bitters may stimulate appetite. Bitter should be taken at least 20 minutes before a meal. Gentian (should be from the plant *Gentiana lutea*). This herb has a bitter taste, which your child may not like. Honey can enhance the taste of this herb. Other commonly used bitters are dandelion and Centaury. These should be taken in tea form.