

A practical guide to living
with and after cancer

EATING PROBLEMS AND CANCER

**WE ARE
MACMILLAN.
CANCER SUPPORT**

This booklet is part of a series of booklets on diet and cancer. The other booklets in the series are:

- *Healthy eating and cancer*
- *Recipes for people affected by cancer*
- *The building-up diet.*

Check with your cancer doctor, nurse or dietitian that this is the right booklet for you, and whether you need any additional information.

If you would like more information, contact our cancer support specialists on **0808 808 00 00**. They can send you any other booklets that you need.

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About this booklet

Many people have eating problems during and after treatment for cancer. There are lots of reasons for this: it can be related to the cancer itself, or the side effects of different treatments. This booklet highlights some common eating difficulties and why they happen, and suggests some practical ways to manage them.

We hope it answers some of your questions and helps you cope with some of the problems you may have.

We've included some quotes from people who have had eating problems, and from a dietitian. Some of these are from people who have chosen to share their story with us, and some are from our online community ([macmillan.org.uk/community](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/community)).

If you'd like to discuss this information, call the Macmillan Support Line free on **0808 808 00 00**, Monday–Friday, 9am–8pm. If you're hard of hearing, you can use textphone 0808 808 0121, or Text Relay. For non-English speakers, interpreters are available. Alternatively, visit [macmillan.org.uk](https://www.macmillan.org.uk)

We've also listed other sources of support and information, which we hope you'll find useful. Turn to page 38 43–48 for some useful addresses and websites and page 49 to write down questions for your doctor, nurse or dietitian.

If you find this booklet helpful, you could pass it on to your family and friends. They may also want information to help them support you.



Eating problems and cancer

Special diets

Some people with cancer may have particular eating problems that are not covered in this booklet. For example:

- People with diabetes.
- People who have a colostomy or ileostomy.
- People who have had all or part of their stomach or bowel removed.
- People who have had radiotherapy to their mouth or jaw.

If this includes you, you may need to follow a special designed diet. You can get advice about these diets from your doctor, specialist nurse or dietitian. You can also contact the organisations listed on page 43–44.

Dietitians

If you have any problems with your diet, you can ask your doctor at the hospital to refer you to a dietitian. In some hospitals, you can refer yourself. Contact the hospital's dietetic department for more information. If you're not in hospital, your GP can refer you to a community dietitian.

Qualified dietitians are experts in assessing the food needs of people who are ill. They can review your diet and look at any specialist dietary requirements you may have. They can advise you on which foods are best for you, and also whether any food supplements would be helpful.

'The dietitian I saw twice a week made sure that I was getting enough nutrients to get me back on the road to recovery.'

John

Being diagnosed with cancer

Everyone's nutritional needs will be different when diagnosed with cancer. Some people will feel well and be able to eat normally. For others, weight loss or a poor appetite may have been symptoms that led to their diagnosis. If you had eating problems before you were diagnosed, you may need some support from your doctor or dietitian. They will try to improve your food intake before you start treatment.

Some eating problems may be related to the cancer itself. Depending on where the tumour is in your body, it can make you feel sick (nausea), be sick (vomit), or it can cause pain or poor digestion. The tumour may also change the way your body uses the food you do eat, so that you don't get all the nutrients you should.

Cancer treatments

Some cancer treatments can cause eating problems. Some problems are temporary and improve when you finish treatment. Others may last longer.

Surgery

In the short-term, surgery can slow down your digestion. If you have surgery to your mouth, throat, stomach or intestine, it can take some time for you to return to a more regular eating pattern.

Radiotherapy

Radiotherapy to your head, neck or chest area can cause taste changes, swallowing difficulties, a dry mouth and a very sore mouth and throat. Radiotherapy to your tummy (abdomen) or pelvic areas can make you feel sick (nauseous), or be sick (vomit), or it can cause diarrhoea.

Chemotherapy

Common side effects of some chemotherapy treatments can include loss of appetite, taste changes, constipation, diarrhoea, feeling sick or being sick and a sore mouth.

'I found that during and after chemo my taste buds were all messed up and it took a couple of months for things to drift back to as they were pre-treatment. What I found was the taste of things changed.'

John

Targeted (biological) therapy

This can affect your appetite or your ability to eat. Problems might include taste changes, a dry or sore mouth, diarrhoea and feeling sick.

Risk of infection

A possible side effect of cancer treatment is an increased risk of infection. This is mainly a side effect of chemotherapy. It happens because the treatment can temporarily lower the number of white blood cells in your body, which help to fight infection. When the number of white blood cells is low, it's called neutropenia.

Most people having chemotherapy will not need to change their diet. If you are on high-dose chemotherapy, you may be advised to avoid foods that contain harmful bacteria and be careful with food hygiene. This is called a 'clean diet' and it can help to reduce your risk of getting an infection. We can send you further information about avoiding an infection. Your specialist nurse will also discuss this with you.



Mouth and throat problems

Soreness and ulceration of the lining of the mouth or throat is called mucositis and can be very painful. It can be caused by chemotherapy, targeted therapies, and radiotherapy to the head and neck. Damage to the cells lining the mouth or throat is usually temporary and most side effects will go when treatment ends.

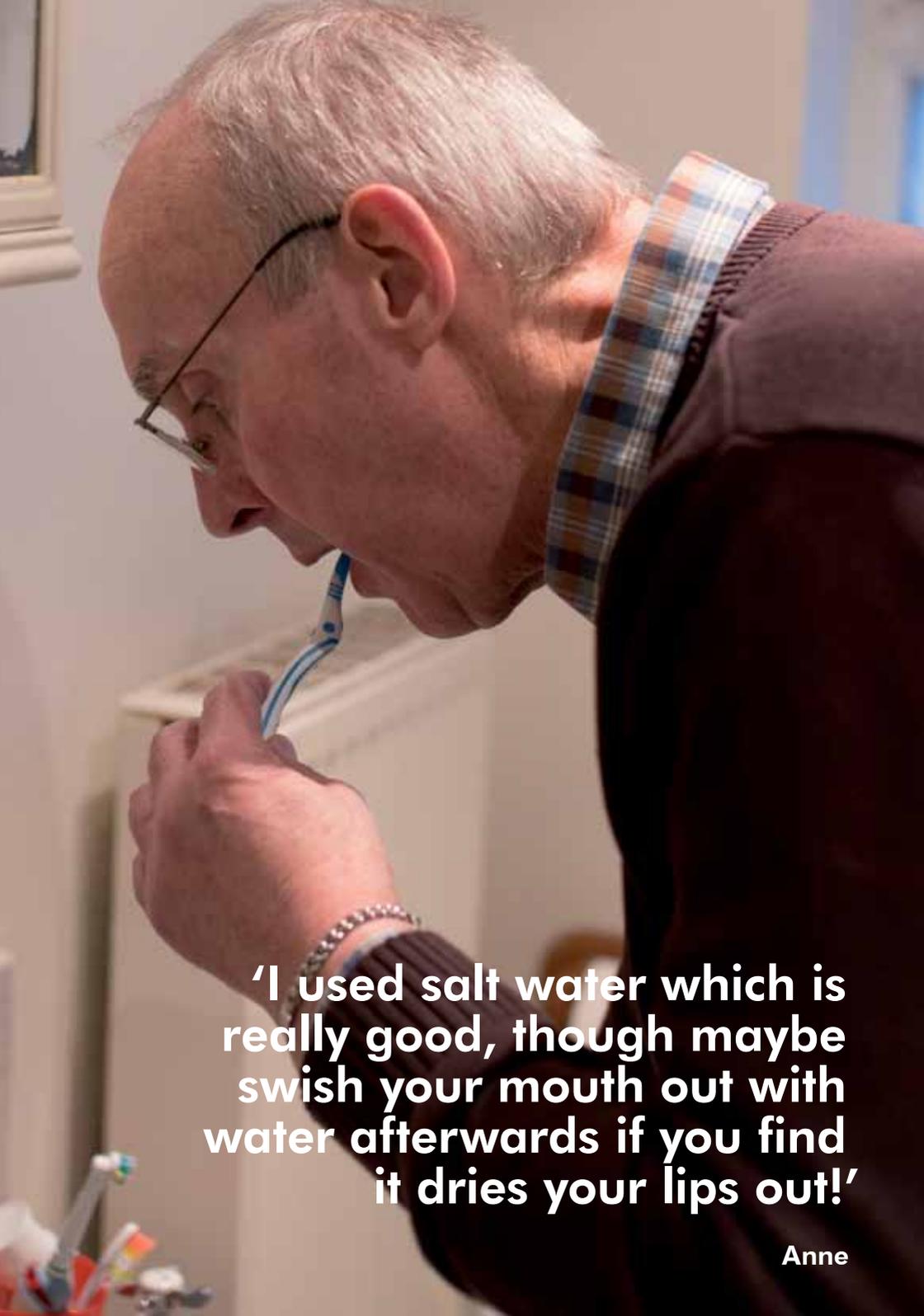
Your specialist nurse and doctor will talk to you about mouth care during treatment and they may examine your mouth from time to time. Tell them if your mouth is sore or if it is getting worse.



Tips to help you keep your mouth healthy

- Drink plenty of fluids, especially water. If you find that fresh fruit juices sting your mouth, try less acidic juices instead. For example, you could try peach or pear nectar and blackcurrant or rosehip syrup. Some pre-prepared drinks that taste like fruit juice may also be helpful. These are available from health food shops and some supermarkets. Try milk or milk based drinks, such as malted drinks, milk shakes and hot chocolate.
- Cold foods and drinks may be more soothing. Try adding crushed ice to drinks and eating ice cream or soft milk jellies. Some people find sucking on ice soothing.
- Very hot or cold drinks may irritate your sore mouth so try having drinks that are lukewarm or at room temperature.
- Try drinking through a straw.
- Avoid salty or spicy food that may sting.

- Avoid rough-textured food, such as toast or raw vegetables, as they can scrape at sore areas.
- Keep your food moist with sauces and gravies.
- Tell your doctor if you have a sore mouth. They can prescribe soothing or antiseptic lotions or sprays for you. You may also need painkillers before mealtimes to help you with swallowing.
- Mouthwashes can be very soothing, but many available in chemists or shops may be too strong for you. Evidence shows that salt-water mouthwashes are just as effective at reducing soreness, or your doctor can prescribe an anaesthetic gel or mouthwash instead. Many hospitals have their own mouth care guidelines for people having chemotherapy or radiotherapy. Your doctor or specialist nurse will be able to advise you.
- Speak to your dentist about support during your cancer treatment. They may recommend high-fluoride or non-foaming toothpaste to help reduce soreness.
- Use a children's soft toothbrush to clean your teeth gently. Avoid toothpicks when cleaning your teeth.
- If you wear dentures, soak them in a denture-cleaning solution overnight and leave them out for as long as you can during the day to prevent them rubbing your gums. If you're having radiotherapy to the jaw area, you may be advised to keep your dentures in as much as possible during the day. This will help maintain the shape of your gums. However, if your mouth is very sore, it may be more comfortable to not wear your dentures.

A close-up, side-profile photograph of an elderly man with short, grey hair and glasses. He is wearing a dark, ribbed sweater over a plaid collared shirt. He is leaning forward, brushing his teeth with a blue and white toothbrush. The background is a bathroom with a white sink and a mirror. The lighting is soft and indoor.

'I used salt water which is really good, though maybe swish your mouth out with water afterwards if you find it dries your lips out!'

Anne



Tips if you have a dry mouth

Radiotherapy to the head and neck area and some chemotherapy drugs can damage the saliva glands, and this may lead to a dry mouth (xerostomia).

- If your tongue is 'coated' it may make your food taste unpleasant and might put you off eating. You can clean your tongue with a bicarbonate of soda solution: use one teaspoon of bicarbonate of soda (available from your chemist) dissolved in a pint (570mls) of warm water. Clean your tongue with a soft toothbrush, foamstick or gauze, dipped in the solution. Check with your clinical nurse specialist for further advice.
- Frequent drinks, even if you just take a few sips at a time, can help keep your mouth moist. You may find fizzy drinks the most refreshing. Keep a glass of water by your bedside and carry water with you whenever you go out.
- Try sucking ice cubes or lollies. You can make lollies by freezing fresh fruit juice in ice-cube trays or in special lolly containers with sticks.
- Keep your food moist with sauces and gravies.
- Avoid chocolate and pastry as they can stick to the roof of your mouth.
- Chewing gum can sometimes stimulate your saliva.

- Tell your doctor about your dry mouth. They can prescribe mouthwashes, lozenges, artificial saliva sprays or gels, if you think they will help.
- Use lip balm or petroleum jelly for dry lips, but do not use any balm on your lips during radiotherapy treatment – speak to your clinical nurse specialist or radiotherapy team about this.



You may find it helpful to read our information about having a dry mouth and about mouth care during chemotherapy.



Tips for coping with taste changes

Some people with cancer find that their taste changes, although this is usually temporary. They may no longer enjoy certain foods, find that all foods taste the same, taste very sweet or salty, or notice a metallic taste in their mouth. Occasionally, they can't taste anything at all.

- Eat foods that you enjoy and ignore those that don't appeal to you, but try them again after a few weeks as your sense of taste may change again.
- Use seasonings, spices and herbs such as pepper, cumin or rosemary to flavour your cooking. However, if your mouth is sore, you may find that some spices and seasonings make it worse.
- Try marinating meat in fruit juices or wine, or cook it in strong sauces such as curry or sweet and sour.
- Cold meats may taste better served with pickle or chutney.
- Sharp-tasting foods such as fresh fruit, fruit juices and bitter boiled sweets can be refreshing and leave a pleasant taste in your mouth.
- If you no longer like tea or coffee, try lemon tea, or perhaps an ice-cold fizzy drink such as lemonade.

- Some people find that cold foods taste better than hot foods. If your sense of taste or smell has changed, it can sometimes help to serve food at room temperature.
- Serve fish, chicken and egg dishes with sauces.
- Use plastic cutlery if you notice a metallic taste in your mouth.

'I lost my sense of sweet taste completely during my treatment, which was very weird because of the mismatch with how food smelt and how it tasted. It came back a few months later, but the whole salt thing has taken much longer to sort itself out.'

Josie



Tips for coping with difficulties chewing or swallowing

Chemotherapy, and radiotherapy treatments for a head or neck cancer, can affect the cells in the lining of the throat, which can make it painful to chew or swallow. An infection in your mouth and throat can also make chewing and swallowing uncomfortable. A common mouth infection is thrush (candidiasis). It shows as white spots on your mouth and tongue, or your tongue and mouth lining become red and swollen. Thrush is treated with anti-fungal tablets. Some people are prescribed these tablets to prevent thrush.

Let your doctor or dietitian know if you're having any difficulties. If you find that drinks make you cough, you should tell your doctor or specialist nurse as soon as possible.

- You may find that taking painkillers before mealtimes can help you chew and swallow more easily. Your doctor or nurse can advise you about this.
- Keep eating your favourite foods where possible, but make changes to soften them. For example, cover foods in interesting sauces and gravies; finely chop meat and vegetables then casserole or stew them; and cut the crusts off bread for softer sandwiches. If you have a blender, you could liquidise cooked foods.
- There are several balanced food supplements that you may find helpful, for example Build up[®] or Complan[®] drinks. You can buy these in your chemist or supermarket. Your doctor may give you a prescription for some of them.

Too tired to cook or eat

Feeling very tired (fatigued) is a common side effect of cancer treatment. It's often worse towards the end of a course of radiotherapy or chemotherapy and for some weeks after it's finished. You may find you're struggling to cook your meals and are even too tired to eat.



Tips to help you cope with tiredness

- This is the time to use convenience foods such as frozen meals, tinned foods and ready meals. Remember though, to defrost frozen foods thoroughly and to cook all foods properly to avoid any risk of food poisoning. Read cooking instructions carefully and stick to them.
- Try to plan ahead. If you have a freezer, prepare food while you are feeling active and freeze it for when you're more tired. You could stock up on convenience foods or use a meal delivery company.

'Eating small regular portions can help with tiredness. Starchy and high fibre foods are best for providing slow release energy.'

Teresa, Cancer Information Nurse



- This is also a good opportunity to give family and friends the chance to help by doing some shopping or cooking for you.
- If you really can't face eating, try a nourishing drink. You can make a smoothie by blending bananas, peaches, strawberries or other soft fruit (fresh or frozen) with fortified milk, fruit juice, ice cream or yoghurt in a liquidiser or blender. See our booklet *The building-up diet* for further advice. If needed, your doctor, nurse or dietitian can prescribe or recommend supplement drinks and puddings for you.
- If you feel you need more help at home with your cooking or eating, tell your GP or contact the dietitian at your hospital. They may be able to arrange for you to have meals delivered (meals on wheels) or someone to help you prepare your food.

Bowel changes affecting diet



Tips to help prevent or reduce constipation

Constipation means that you're not able to open your bowels routinely and it can become difficult or painful for you to pass bowel motions. Some chemotherapy drugs, anti-sickness drugs and painkillers can cause constipation.

'Constipation is a real nuisance but drinking more water and also getting more full-fat bio yoghurt into your diet may help. I was also told to drink the clear long life apple juice as this contains a lot of fibre.'

Lynne

- Make sure you have plenty of fibre (roughage) in your diet. Good sources of fibre include: wholewheat breakfast cereals like Weetabix[®], Shredded Wheat[®] or muesli; wholemeal bread and flour; brown rice; wholemeal pasta; and fresh fruit and vegetables.
- Make sure you drink plenty of fluids – both hot and cold drinks will help. Aim to drink at least two litres (3.5 pints) a day. This is particularly important if you increase the amount of fibre in your diet, as eating fibre without drinking enough fluids can make constipation worse.

- Popular natural remedies for constipation are prune juice, prunes and syrup of figs.
- Gentle exercise, such as walking, will help keep your bowels moving.
- If the constipation is due to medicines that you're taking, it may be possible to adjust the dose you take. You may need to take laxatives as well. Talk to your doctor who can give you further advice.

If you have cancer of the bowel, or you think that your bowel may be affected by your cancer treatment, always ask your doctor or specialist nurse for advice on dealing with constipation. A diet with lots of fibre in it may make your symptoms worse.





Tips to help with diarrhoea

Diarrhoea usually means that you need to pass more bowel motions in a day than is normal for you, and the stools you pass are looser than normal.

It can be caused by chemotherapy, radiotherapy, targeted therapies and surgery. The treatments can affect the healthy cells that line the digestive tract, which causes diarrhoea. Sometimes other medications, such as antibiotics, or an infection can also cause diarrhoea.

Diarrhoea can be a temporary, mild side effect. But for some people, it can be severe and they will need to see a doctor to help manage it. Tell your doctor if you have diarrhoea or if it is getting worse. They can investigate the cause, and prescribe anti-diarrhoea medicines.



Sometimes diarrhoea can be severe and it's important to contact the hospital if this happens. If you have more than 4–6 episodes of diarrhoea a day, contact the hospital on the telephone numbers you've been given and speak to a doctor or nurse.

- Make sure you drink plenty of liquid (up to two litres a day) to replace the fluid lost with the diarrhoea, but avoid alcohol and coffee.
- Eat small, frequent meals made from light foods such as dairy produce, white fish, poultry, well-cooked eggs, white bread, pasta or rice. Eat your meals slowly.
- Eat less fibre (cereals, raw fruits and vegetables) until the diarrhoea improves.

- Avoid greasy, fatty foods such as chips and beefburgers, and spicy foods like chilli peppers.
- Acidophilus or other bacteria found in live yoghurt or live yoghurt drinks may help ease diarrhoea caused by antibiotics. Antibiotics can kill off the healthy bacteria normally found in the bowel, but the bacteria found in live yoghurt may replace them. However, you should avoid live yoghurt while you're having chemotherapy or if your immunity is low.

If your diarrhoea is caused by radiotherapy or chemotherapy, changing your diet is unlikely to help. It's important that you take the anti-diarrhoea medicines prescribed by your doctor. If you have diarrhoea after surgery for bowel cancer, discuss it with your doctor or specialist nurse before changing your diet.





Tips for coping with wind

The amount of wind we produce depends on how healthy bacteria and digestive enzymes in our bowel combine with the foods we eat.

After radiotherapy, some people have more wind because their pelvic floor muscles are weaker. Pelvic radiotherapy may also cause an overgrowth of healthy bacteria in the small bowel, which can cause wind. Some types of bowel surgery may result in problems with wind. It can also be caused by constipation and some medicines. If you find the wind difficult to cope with, talk to your doctor or specialist nurse. If passing wind becomes painful, tell your doctor.

- Eat and drink slowly. Take small mouthfuls and chew your food well.
- Avoid food that you think gives you wind. Beans, pickles and fizzy drinks commonly cause problems.
- A popular natural remedy is to drink two teaspoons of peppermint water dissolved in a small cup of hot water. This can be sweetened with sugar.
- You could try taking charcoal tablets, which you can buy in the chemist.
- Gentle exercise, especially walking, can bring some relief.
- Try to ensure your bowels are opening regularly – wind can be a sign of constipation.
- Your GP can prescribe peppermint oil capsules that may help.



Tips to cope with feeling sick (nausea)

Some types of chemotherapy, hormonal therapy and targeted therapy can make you feel sick. Nausea may be caused by radiotherapy to the brain, stomach, bowel or close to the liver. Other drugs, such as painkillers and antibiotics, and physical problems like constipation or liver damage, can also cause nausea.

There are very effective treatments to help prevent and control sickness. Your cancer specialist can prescribe anti-sickness (anti-emetic) drugs for you. Let them know if your anti-sickness drugs are not helping, as there are several different types you can take.

If feeling sick is putting you off your food, these tips may help:

- Try eating dry food, such as toast or crackers, first thing in the morning before you get up.
- If the smell of cooking makes you feel sick, eat cold meals or food from the freezer that only needs heating up. However, remember to follow the cooking instructions to make sure it's properly cooked.
- If possible, let someone else do the cooking.
- Avoid greasy, fatty or fried foods.
- Try sitting by an open window so there's plenty of fresh air in the room while you eat.
- Sit at a table in an upright position when eating, and stay sitting for a short time after the meal.

- When you feel sick, start by eating light foods such as thin soups or egg custards. Gradually introduce small portions of your favourite foods, slowly building up to a more varied diet.
- Food or drink containing ginger can help reduce feelings of sickness. You could try crystallised ginger, ginger tea or ginger biscuits.
- Sipping a fizzy drink is a popular remedy for feeling sick. Try mineral water, ginger ale, lemonade or soda water, and sip it slowly through a straw.
- Try having drinks between meals rather than with your food.
- You could try wearing sea bands (available from chemists) around your wrists. They use acupuncture to help relieve nausea.
- Try to make sure you have regular bowel movements as constipation (see pages 20–21) can make you feel sick.

We can send you more information on coping with nausea and vomiting.

'Self-help ideas include sea sickness wrist bands, ginger (biscuits, ginger ale, ginger beer or ginger sweets) and I think some suggest pineapple too, which also may help with the chemo nasty taste.'

Moomy



Tips for coping with heartburn and indigestion

Heartburn is a burning sensation behind the breastbone that can be very painful. It's caused when acid from the stomach irritates the lining of the gullet (oesophagus).

Indigestion is discomfort in the upper part of the tummy (abdomen), occurring particularly after meals. It can happen when stomach acid irritates the lining of the stomach or small bowel. Some drugs (such as steroids or anti-inflammatory painkillers) and some cancer treatments (such as chemotherapy) can also irritate the stomach lining. You may get indigestion if you have a small stomach capacity, don't eat or drink much or if you don't move around very much.

The best way of dealing with heartburn and indigestion depends on its cause. Talk to your doctor as they can often prescribe medicines to help reduce or relieve it for you.

- Take note of any foods that cause discomfort so you can avoid them. When symptoms have settled, you can try reintroducing them in small quantities one at a time. This makes sure that you are not missing out on vital nutrients.
- Large meals, chocolate, alcohol, fatty and spicy foods, fizzy drinks, chewing gum, hard-boiled sweets, mint, aniseed and dill are all known to commonly cause problems. You may want to limit or avoid these.
- Wear loose clothing around your waist.
- Limit activity for at least 45–60 minutes after eating.

- Antacid medicines can help relieve irritation by neutralizing the acid. You can buy them over the counter at your local pharmacy.
- If you smoke, stop or cut down as the chemicals in cigarette smoke may make indigestion worse. Our booklet *Giving up smoking* has tips on how to stop smoking.
- Try not to lie flat on your back, especially after meals.
- If you get a lot of indigestion at night, avoid eating for 3–4 hours before you go to bed and sleep propped up on pillows.
- Try to achieve and maintain a healthy weight.

Appetite



Tips if you have a poor appetite

During cancer treatment you may lose your appetite because you feel sick, too tired or because things taste different.

- If you can't face big meals, eat small, frequent meals or snacks instead of three meals a day. If you find certain times of the day are better for you, make the most of these.
- Try to make your food look as attractive as possible. Put small portions on your plate and garnish the food with lemon, tomato or parsley.
- Stimulate your appetite with a small sherry or brandy half an hour before you eat. Some people find a glass of wine with their meals helps their digestion. Check with your doctor that you can have alcohol.
- Keep snacks handy to eat whenever you can. Bags of nuts or crisps, dried fruit or a bowl of grated cheese are quite light and tasty. If these are hard for you to swallow, a yoghurt or fromage frais may be easier. If you've recently had surgery or radiotherapy for bowel cancer, you may need advice about the best foods for you. Discuss this with your specialist nurse, doctor or a dietitian.
- Sweet or savoury nourishing drinks can be used to replace small meals and can be sipped slowly through the day (see our booklet *The building-up diet*).
- Eat your meals slowly, chew the food well and relax for a little while after each meal.

- Sometimes the smell of cooking can be appetising, but occasionally it can put you off eating. If cooking smells spoil your appetite, keep away from the kitchen and ask your family or friends to cook. Or try to eat cold foods that don't need cooking.
- Everyone's appetite changes and you may have good and bad days. Make the most of the good days by eating well and treating yourself to your favourite foods.
- Try to eat your meals in a room where you feel relaxed and where there aren't any distractions.
- It may be possible to stimulate your appetite using medicines such as a low dose of steroids or the hormone medroxyprogesterone. Your doctor may prescribe these for you.

Big appetite due to medicines

Some medicines, such as steroids, may give you a big appetite and might make you want to eat much more than usual. It's important to try to eat healthy foods such as fruit and vegetables instead of sweets and crisps so you don't put on too much weight. We can send you our booklet *Healthy eating and cancer*.



Your feelings about eating problems

You may worry that changes in your eating pattern will affect your relationships with your partner, family and friends. You may be anxious about what people think of you or about being rejected. Or you may feel self-conscious about eating at home or out with family or friends.

Many people find that it helps to talk to someone close to them. If you find it difficult to talk about your feelings with your family, you could speak to your doctor or specialist nurse. You may find it helpful to read our booklet *How are you feeling? The emotional effects of cancer*. You can order a free copy by calling us on **0808 808 00 00**.

Getting help with meals

You may not always feel well enough to be able to cook food for yourself or others. If you're the person who usually prepares the meals for your family, it may feel strange to let someone else take charge. Try not to feel guilty about letting someone else do the things you usually do. When you feel better, you can get back into your normal routine.

If you live on your own and need help with cooking or shopping, contact your GP, district nurse or social worker. They may be able to arrange for a home helper, meals on wheels or a local organisation to help you with cooking or shopping.

Caring for someone with eating problems

If you're the main carer for someone with cancer, it can be upsetting and difficult to know how to deal with the eating problems their cancer or treatments have caused. Mealtimes are often an enjoyable and important part of family and social life. It can be frustrating and worrying when someone you're caring for can't eat very much.

People who are very ill often don't feel like eating. Cancer, treatments and medicines can all affect their appetite. Feeling sick and having diarrhoea or constipation can stop them eating. They may feel too tired to eat, have a sore or dry throat or mouth, or find chewing and swallowing difficult. The amount they can eat may change from day to day and their likes and dislikes may also alter.



Suggestions for carers about coping with food preparation and mealtimes

- Take time to ask them what they'd like to eat.
- Try to talk openly about their eating problems and the different ways you could both manage it. This can help you both feel more in control of the situation.
- Try to give small meals often, whenever the person feels like eating, rather than at set times of the day.
- Treat them to their favourite foods at the times when you know their appetite is at its best.



- Keep a range of different foods so that you can offer them something at any time of the day. Tinned foods and pre-prepared frozen meals can be as good for them as a meal that takes a long time to prepare.
- If they can't manage solid food, try soft foods such as porridge, bananas, soup, yoghurt or milk-based foods like custard or rice pudding.
- Moist food is often easier to cope with, and will help to prevent a dry mouth.
- If someone's sense of taste or smell has changed, it can sometimes help to serve food cold or at room temperature.
- Use plastic cutlery if the person affected by cancer notices a metallic taste in their mouth.
- If the person you're caring for finds that certain cooking smells make them feel sick, prepare food in a different room if possible. Serve food in a well-ventilated room.
- Be aware of how energy supplements can be used to add energy to everyday meals and drinks. For example, you could try adding fortified milk to tea or coffee (see our booklet *The building-up diet*).
- Try not to worry if they can't always eat what you've cooked. And don't urge or nag them much, as this can be unhelpful.
- Take special care while preparing food when the person you care for may be at risk of infections. The doctors or dietitian at the hospital will be able to advise you about this.
- Make sure you have support and take time to care for yourself.

Helpful books about eating problems and cancer

Here are some books and leaflets about eating problems and cancer. You may find some of them helpful.

Eating – help yourself. A guide for patients with eating problems, and their families

The Christie NHS Foundation Trust, 2012, £2

This booklet has advice on how to eat well when trying to cope with loss of appetite, changes in taste, dry mouth, difficulties swallowing, feeling full, nausea, diarrhoea, and constipation. It has tips on how to make food as nourishing as possible and ideas for snacks and drinks.

Eating well when you have cancer. A guide for cancer patients when eating may be difficult

The Royal Marsden NHS Foundation Trust, 2012, £3

This booklet has been written to help people eat well when they have a poor appetite or are losing weight. It suggests foods to help maintain a healthy diet, foods to avoid, nourishing and supplementary drinks, and high-energy foods. It also has advice for times when eating is difficult, for example because of fatigue, nausea, sore mouth, diarrhoea, or constipation. It includes recipes and sources of further information and support.

Nutritional drinks. A guide for patients and their carers
The Christie NHS Foundation Trust, 2012, £2

Designed by dietitians for people with eating difficulties, this booklet describes the supplements available, those that are most suitable, and how each product can be used.

Swallowing – nutrition when it's difficult
Oesophageal Patients Association, 2013, Free

This short booklet gives advice on eating when swallowing is difficult. It includes tips to help cope with a lack of appetite, indigestion, nausea, and diarrhoea. It also has information about food supplements, energy supplements and soft nutritious foods. It also includes recipes.



About our information

We provide expert, up-to-date information about cancer. And all our information is free for everyone.

Order what you need

You may want to order more leaflets or booklets like this one. Visit **be.macmillan.org.uk** or call us on **0808 808 00 00**.

We have booklets on different cancer types, treatments and side effects. We also have information about work, financial issues, diet, life after cancer and information for carers, family and friends.

All of our information is also available online at **macmillan.org.uk/cancerinformation**

There you'll also find videos featuring real-life stories from people affected by cancer, and information from health and social care professionals.

Other formats

We also provide information in different languages and formats, including:

- audiobooks
- Braille
- British Sign Language
- Easy Read booklets
- large print
- translations.

Find out more at **macmillan.org.uk/otherformats**

If you'd like us to produce information in a different format for you, email us at **cancerinformationteam@macmillan.org.uk** or call us on **0808 808 00 00**.

Help us improve our information

We know that the people who use our information are the real experts. That's why we always involve them in our work. If you've been affected by cancer, you can help us improve our information.

We give you the chance to comment on a variety of information including booklets, leaflets and fact sheets.

If you'd like to hear more about becoming a reviewer, email reviewing@macmillan.org.uk You can get involved from home whenever you like, and we don't ask for any special skills – just an interest in our cancer information.



Other ways we can help you

At Macmillan, we know how a cancer diagnosis can affect everything, and we're here to support you. No one should face cancer alone.

Talk to us

If you or someone you know is affected by cancer, talking about how you feel and sharing your concerns can really help.

Macmillan Support Line

Our free, confidential phone line is open Monday–Friday, 9am–8pm. Our cancer support specialists can:

- help with any medical questions you have about your cancer or treatment
- help you access benefits and give you financial advice
- be there to listen if you need someone to talk to
- tell you about services that can help you in your area.

Call us on **0808 808 00 00** or email us via our website, **macmillan.org.uk/talktous**

Information centres

Our information and support centres are based in hospitals, libraries and mobile centres. There, you can speak with someone face to face.

Visit one to get the information you need, or if you'd like a private chat, most centres have a room where you can speak with someone alone and in confidence.

Find your nearest centre at **macmillan.org.uk/informationcentres** or call us on **0808 808 00 00**.

Talk to others

No one knows more about the impact cancer can have on your life than those who have been through it themselves. That's why we help to bring people together in their communities and online.

Support groups

Whether you are someone living with cancer or a carer, we can help you find support in your local area, so you can speak face to face with people who understand. Find out about support groups in your area by calling us or by visiting [macmillan.org.uk/selfhelpandsupport](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/selfhelpandsupport)

Online community

Thousands of people use our online community to make friends, blog about their experiences and join groups to meet other people going through the same things. You can access it any time of day or night. Share your experiences, ask questions, or just read through people's posts at [macmillan.org.uk/community](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/community)

The Macmillan healthcare team

Our nurses, doctors and other health and social care professionals give expert care and support to individuals and their families. Call us or ask your GP, consultant, district nurse or hospital ward sister if there are any Macmillan professionals near you.

'Everyone is so supportive on the online community, they know exactly what you're going through. It can be fun too. It's not all just chats about cancer.'

Mal

Help with money worries

Having cancer can bring extra costs such as hospital parking, travel fares and higher heating bills. If you've been affected in this way, we can help.

Financial advice

Our financial guidance team can give you advice on mortgages, pensions, insurance, borrowing and savings.

Help accessing benefits

Our benefits advisers can offer advice and information on benefits, tax credits, grants and loans. They can help you work out what financial help you could be entitled to. They can also help you complete your forms and apply for benefits.

Macmillan Grants

Macmillan offers one-off payments to people with cancer. A grant can be for anything from heating bills or extra clothing to a much-needed break.

Call us on **0808 808 00 00** to speak to a financial guide or benefits adviser, or to find out more about Macmillan Grants. We can also tell you about benefits advisers in your area.

Visit **[macmillan.org.uk/financialsupport](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/financialsupport)** to find out more about how we can help you with your finances.

Help with work and cancer

Whether you're an employee, a carer, an employer or are self-employed, we can provide support and information to help you manage cancer at work.

Visit **[macmillan.org.uk/work](https://www.macmillan.org.uk/work)**

Other useful organisations

There are lots of other organisations that can give you information or support.

Nutrition and diet information and support

British Dietetic Association (BDA)

5th Floor, Charles House,
148–9 Great Charles Street,
Queensway,
Birmingham B3 3HT

Tel 0121 200 8080

Email info@bda.uk.com

www.bda.uk.com

Provides training and facilities for registered dietitians.

The website includes food facts, and has information on the role of dietitians and how to find a freelance dietitian.

CORE

3 St Andrews Place,
London NW1 4LB

Tel 020 7486 0341

Email info@corecharity.org.uk

www.corecharity.org.uk

Funds research into a range of gut, liver, intestinal and bowel illnesses. Its website provides information on digestive disorders, treatments and coping with the effects of digestive disorders.

Diabetes UK

Macleod House,
10 Parkway,
London NW1 7AA

Careline 0845 120 2960

(Mon–Fri, 9am–5pm)

Email

careline@diabetes.org.uk

www.diabetes.org.uk

Gives information and support on any aspect of managing diabetes, including medication, diet and exercise.

IA – The Ileostomy and Internal Pouch Support Group

Peverill House,
1–5 Mill Road,
Ballyclare BT39 9DR
Freephone 0800 0184 724

Email info@iasupport.org
www.iasupport.org

Aims to help anyone who has had or is about to have their colon removed and has an ileostomy or internal pouch.

Oesophageal Patients' Association

22 Vulcan House,
Vulcan Road,
Solihull B91 2JY
Helpline 0121 704 9860
(Mon–Fri, 9am–3pm)

Email enquiries@opa.org.uk
www.opa.org.uk

Provides telephone support for oesophageal cancer patients and their families. Has free leaflets on the association, post-operative recovery, and swallowing problems.

Patients on Intravenous and Nasogastric Nutrition Therapy (PINNT)

PO Box 3126,
Christchurch,
Dorset BH23 2XS
www.pinnt.co.uk

Support for people who need artificial nutrition. Aims to encourage contact and mutual support between members.

General cancer support organisations

Cancer Black Care

79 Acton Lane,
London NW10 8UT
Tel 020 8961 4151

Email info@cancerblackcare.org.uk
www.cancerblackcare.org.uk

Offers information and support for people with cancer from ethnic communities, their friends, carers and families.

Cancer Research UK
www.cancerhelp.org.uk

Has patient information on all types of cancer and has a clinical trials database.

Cancer Support Scotland

Calman Cancer Support Centre, 75 Shelley Road, Glasgow G12 0ZE

Tel 0800 652 4531

Email info@cancersupportscotland.org

cancersupportscotland.org

www.cancersupportscotland.org

Runs cancer support groups throughout Scotland. Also offers free complementary therapies and counselling to anyone affected by cancer.

Maggie's Cancer Caring Centres

1st Floor, One Waterloo Street, Glasgow G2 6AY

Tel 0300 123 1801

Email enquiries@maggiescentres.org

maggiescentres.org

www.maggiescentres.org

Provide information about cancer, benefits advice, and emotional or psychological support.

Tenovus

Head Office,
Gleider House,
Ty Glas Road,
Cardiff CF14 5BD

Tel 0808 808 1010

(Mon–Sun, 8am–8pm)

www.tenovus.org.uk

Aims to help everyone get equal access to cancer treatment and support. Funds research and provides support such as mobile cancer support units, a free helpline, an 'Ask the nurse' service on the website and benefits advice.

Counselling and emotional support

British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP)

BACP House,
15 St John's Business Park,
Lutterworth LE17 4HB

Tel 01455 883 300

Email bacp@bacp.co.uk

www.bacp.co.uk

Promotes awareness of counselling and signposts people to appropriate services. You can search for a qualified counsellor at **itsgoodtotalk.org.uk**

UK Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP)

2nd Floor, Edward House,
2 Wakley Street,
London EC1V 7LT

Tel 020 7014 9955

Email info@ukcp.org.uk

www.psychotherapy.org.uk

Lists psychotherapists and psychotherapeutic counsellors who meet exacting standards and training requirements.

Support for carers

Carers Direct

PO Box 4338,
Manchester M61 0BY

Helpline 0808 802 0202

(Mon–Fri, 8am–9pm,
Sat–Sun, 11am–4pm)

www.nhs.uk/carersdirect/pages/carersdirecthome.aspx

Aims to offer all the information you need as a carer to access the financial help you're entitled to, as well as advice on getting a break from caring, going to work and much more.

Carers UK

20 Great Dover Street,
London SE1 4LX

Tel 0808 808 7777

(Wed–Thu, 10am–12pm
and 2–4pm)

Email info@carersuk.org

www.carersuk.org

Offers information and support to carers. Can put people in contact with local support groups. Has national offices for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland:

Carers Scotland

The Cottage,
21 Pearce Street,
Glasgow G51 3UT
Tel 0141 445 3070

Email info@carerscotland.org
www.carersuk.org/scotland

Carers Wales

River House,
Ynsbridge Court,
Cardiff CF15 9SS
Tel 029 2081 1370

Email info@carerswales.org
www.carersuk.org/wales

Carers Northern Ireland

58 Howard Street,
Belfast BT1 6PJ
Tel 028 9043 9843

Email info@carersni.org
www.carersuk.org/northernireland

General health information

Health and Social Care in Northern Ireland
www.hscni.net

Provides information about health and social care services in Northern Ireland.

Healthonline

www.healthonline.org
www.youthhealthtalk.org
(site for young people)

Has information about cancer, and videos and audio clips of people's experiences.

National Cancer Institute – National Institute of Health – USA

www.cancer.gov
Gives information on cancer and treatments.

NHS Choices

www.nhs.uk
The UK's biggest health information website. Also has service information for England.

NHS Direct Wales

www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk
NHS health information site for Wales.

NHS Inform

www.nhsinform.co.uk
NHS health information site for Scotland.

Patient UK

www.patient.co.uk

Provides people in the UK with information about health and disease. Includes evidence-based information leaflets on a wide variety of medical and health topics. Also reviews and links to many health- and illness-related websites.

Financial or legal information

Benefit Enquiry Line

Northern Ireland

Tel 0800 220 674

(Mon–Wed and Fri, 9am–5pm, Thu, 10am–5pm)

Textphone 0800 243 787

www.nidirect.gov.uk/money-tax-and-benefits

Provides information and advice about disability benefits and carers' benefits.

Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)

Disability Benefits Helpline

08457 123 456

Textphone 0845 722 4433

Personal Independence

Payment Helpline 0845 850 3322

Textphone 0845 601 6677

Carer's Allowance Unit

0845 608 4321

Textphone 0845 604 5312

www.gov.uk/browse/benefits

Manages state benefits in England, Scotland and Wales. You can apply for benefits and find information online or through its helplines.



You can search for more organisations on our website at macmillan.org.uk/organisations, or call us on 0808 808 00 00.

Disclaimer

We make every effort to ensure that the information we provide is accurate and up to date but it should not be relied upon as a substitute for specialist professional advice tailored to your situation. So far as is permitted by law, Macmillan does not accept liability in relation to the use of any information contained in this publication, or third-party information or websites included or referred to in it.

Thanks

This booklet has been written, revised and edited by Macmillan Cancer Support's Cancer Information Development team. It has been approved by our Chief Medical Editor, Dr Tim Iveson, Macmillan Consultant Medical Oncologist.

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Can you do something to help?

We hope this booklet has been useful to you. It's just one of our many publications that are available free to anyone affected by cancer. They're produced by our cancer information specialists who, along with our nurses, benefits advisers, campaigners and volunteers, are part of the Macmillan team. When people are facing the toughest fight of their lives, we're there to support them every step of the way.

We want to make sure no one has to go through cancer alone, so we need more people to help us. When the time is right for you, here are some ways in which you can become a part of our team.



Share your cancer experience

Support people living with cancer by telling your story, online, in the media or face to face.

Campaign for change

We need your help to make sure everyone gets the right support. Take an action, big or small, for better cancer care.

Help someone in your community

A lift to an appointment. Help with the shopping. Or just a cup of tea and a chat. Could you lend a hand?

Raise money

Whatever you like doing you can raise money to help. Take part in one of our events or create your own.

Give money

Big or small, every penny helps. To make a one-off donation see over.

Call us to find out more

0300 1000 200

macmillan.org.uk/getinvolved

Please fill in your personal details

Mr/Mrs/Miss/Other

Name

Surname

Address

Postcode

Phone

Email

Please accept my gift of £

(Please delete as appropriate)
I enclose a cheque / postal order /
Charity Voucher made payable to
Macmillan Cancer Support

OR debit my:
Visa / MasterCard / CAF Charity
Card / Switch / Maestro

Card number

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Don't let the taxman keep your money

Do you pay tax? If so, your gift will be worth 25% more to us – at no extra cost to you. All you have to do is tick the box below, and the tax office will give 25p for every pound you give.

- I am a UK taxpayer and I would like Macmillan Cancer Support to treat all donations I have made for the four years prior to this year, and all donations I make in the future, as Gift Aid donations, until I notify you otherwise.

I confirm I have paid or will pay an amount of Income Tax and/or Capital Gains Tax in each tax year, that is at least equal to the tax that Charities & CASCs I donate to will reclaim on my gifts. I understand that other taxes such as VAT and Council Tax do not qualify and that Macmillan Cancer Support will reclaim 25p of tax on every £1 that I give.

Macmillan Cancer Support and our trading companies would like to hold your details in order to contact you about our fundraising, campaigning and services for people affected by cancer. If you would prefer us not to use your details in this way please tick this box.

In order to carry out our work we may need to pass your details to agents or partners who act on our behalf.



If you'd rather donate online go to macmillan.org.uk/donate

Please cut out this form and return it in an envelope (no stamp required) to:
Supporter Donations, Macmillan Cancer Support, FREEPOST LON15851,
89 Albert Embankment, London SE1 7UQ

More than one in three of us will get cancer. For most of us it will be the toughest fight we ever face. And the feelings of isolation and loneliness that so many people experience make it even harder. But you don't have to go through it alone. The Macmillan team is with you every step of the way.

We are the nurses and therapists helping you through treatment. The experts on the end of the phone. The advisers telling you which benefits you're entitled to. The volunteers giving you a hand with the everyday things. The campaigners improving cancer care. The community there for you online, any time. The supporters who make it all possible.

Together, we are all Macmillan Cancer Support.

For cancer support every step of the way, call Macmillan on 0808 808 00 00 (Mon–Fri, 9am–8pm) or visit macmillan.org.uk

Hard of hearing? Use textphone 0808 808 0121, or Text Relay.
Non-English speaker? Interpreters available.
Braille and large print versions on request.

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CANCER SUPPORT**