



4. LIFESTYLE

This booklet is about living with advanced cancer, including how you choose to eat, exercise, work and relax within the limitations of your illness. To try to get the most out of life, some people with advanced cancer make major changes to their lifestyle, whereas others prefer to continue on as normally as possible.

Diet

Eating can become a vicious cycle for someone with advanced cancer. You know you need a balanced diet to stay well and strong enough to control symptoms, but those symptoms may have stolen your appetite and made eating unpleasant.

Depending on your treatment, the right kinds of food can improve your strength, fight infection and help you recover more quickly.⁹⁴ You may also need to adapt your diet to cope with symptoms such as pain, constipation or diarrhoea⁹⁵ (see Chapter 1 [pgs 25-30] for dietary tips for coping with various symptoms).

If you are losing weight due to treatment, or because you are struggling to eat, you may need to increase your protein and calories. If you are overweight, or if treatment⁹⁵ or a lack of mobility is causing you to put on weight, you may need a diet that is rich in nutrients but lower in energy.

The guidelines for a balanced diet when you have advanced cancer resemble those for healthy eating in general: eat fruit and vegetables, whole grains, legumes/beans, small amounts of meat or fish and a smattering of good fats. All this should be done, as far as your illness will allow and in consultation with your health care team.

When appropriate, the Cancer Council Australia recommends the following for people with advanced cancer:

- Eat plenty of vegetables, legumes and fruit – five or more servings of vegetables and two or more servings of fruit per day.
- Have cereals (preferably wholegrain) – between three and twelve servings each day, depending on age, gender and energy needs.
- Eat meat in moderation – no more than three to four servings of lean red meat each week and avoid processed meats.
- Select lower fat foods like lean meat and reduced-fat dairy products, and try using low-fat cooking methods like grilling instead of frying.
- Choose low-salt products – flavour foods instead with herbs and spices.

tips

- 1 serving of vegetables: ½ cup cooked vegetable or cooked legumes, 1 medium potato, 1 cup salad vegetables.
- 1 serving of fruits: 1 medium piece (eg. apple), 2 small pieces (eg. apricots), 1 cup chopped or canned fruit.
- 1 serving of cereals: slice of bread (35g), ½ pita bread (35g) or 125ml (½ cup) of cooked pasta, rice or couscous.

The ideal, for an optimum quality of life, is to get the nutrients you need in food that you can both stomach and enjoy, and to be able to dine with your family and friends.

What may help

Talk to your Doctor

Your doctor may be able to treat some of the symptoms – such as nausea or mouth ulcers – that hinder eating. They can also advise you on weight management and eating or refer you to a dietician.

Talk to a dietician

A dietician can provide you with a dietary plan that meets your nutritional needs while taking into account the factors affecting your eating.

Talk to your friends

Your friends and family may be happy to accommodate your dietary needs so you can enjoy eating with them. You may prefer to go out for breakfast or lunch, for instance, rather than go to dinner when you may be tired and the food may be too heavy and the portions too big. If friends or family want to cook for you, brief them on what you can eat.



Q&A

Q: I love to have a drink with my friends, but should I be avoiding alcohol?

A: Despite convincing evidence that alcohol is a risk factor for some types of cancer, there is no evidence to say that drinking if you have cancer is a concern. The Cancer Council recommends cancer survivors limit (no more than two standard drinks a day for men and one for women) or avoid alcohol, and this is probably a good guideline for someone with advanced cancer too – if only to help your body remain as strong as possible to fight symptoms. Talk to your Doctor about it and ask about how alcohol may mix with your treatment and medications.

- If you have no appetite but need to maintain or increase your weight, try:
- Eating small meals more often
 - Eating as soon as you feel hungry, rather than waiting for meal times
 - Using supplements, such as Sustagen or Fortisip (ask your doctor, nurse or dietician for advice)
 - Adding cream or butter to meals
 - Snacking on yoghurt, cheese and crackers, or milkshakes
 - Adding lentils or split peas to soups and casseroles
- If you need to control your weight but maintain your nutrients, try:
- Eating regularly – don't skip meals, but keep them small
 - Replacing energy-dense foods with vegetables and salad (soft or pureed, if necessary)
 - Filling up on soup
 - Making your carbohydrates wholegrain, where possible (eg. brown rice, wholemeal bread)
 - Using reduced-fat dairy products
 - Using high-density foods such as lollies, chocolate, pastries and biscuits as occasional treats only
 - Watching out for “sneaky” calories in soft drinks and alcohol⁹⁶

For more information

- The **Cancer Council Helpline (13 11 20)** can provide you with dietary advice.
- The Cancer Council NSW has a booklet on Living with Advanced Cancer, which has some dietary tips. Call **13 11 20** to have one sent to you or go to **www.cancercouncil.com.au** to download a copy.
- You may find some useful links to dietitians and other dietary information through the **Dieticians Association of Australia (www.daa.asn.au)** and **Nutrition Australia (www.nutritionaustralia.org)** websites.



Exercise

The consensus seems to be that the more you can keep your body moving, the better it will be for many (though not necessarily all) of your symptoms, your overall strength and stamina, and your state of mind.

Exercise may help to fight infection (primarily by increasing oxygen in the blood), reduce pain (by releasing opiate-like endorphins), strengthen joints, relieve constipation or nausea, encourage sleep, relieve stress⁹⁷ and expose you to fresh air and sunlight.

Some people with advanced cancer will struggle to exercise, while others may overdo it. The type and amount of exercise you can manage depends on your cancer, treatment, symptoms and other factors which your doctor or relevant health professionals will need to take into account.

What may help

Talk to your Doctor

Even if you feel well enough to run a half-marathon, check with your doctor, physiotherapist or occupational therapist first. They will want to encourage your enthusiasm, but they will also know more about potential complications. Alternatively, they may be able to help you with symptoms that are preventing you from exercising, or with some advice on getting moving.

Work out with others

If you are capable of exercising but can't get motivated try walking or cycling with a friend. Make sure they understand your limitations. You may find an exercise partner in a cancer support group.

Work out alone

Going at it alone may work if you are concerned about holding others back, or even a little awkward about your physical restrictions. You may simply enjoy the time alone.

Look for alternatives

If your choice of exercise is ruled out, there may be other things you can do. Swimming or cycling may replace weight-bearing activities such as jogging, walking, yoga or tai chi may be options. If you are not into exercise as such, maybe dancing or gardening will interest you.

- Some general guidelines for exercising when you have advanced cancer:
 - Listen to your body – if it is screaming for you to stop, then perhaps you should.
 - Give yourself a day's rest after chemotherapy and other taxing treatments.
 - Try working out in short daily bouts, as opposed to one gruelling session a week.
 - If you are too exhausted to work out, some stretching or taking a stroll outdoors may suffice.
 - If you are bedridden, speak to a physiotherapist about any exercises you can do.⁹⁷

For more information

- Seek advice through the **Cancer Council Helpline (13 11 20)**.



- **The Victorian Government's Better Health Channel (www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au)** has a useful fact sheet on Cancer – Exercise to Help You Cope.

Work and leisure

A diagnosis of advanced cancer does not necessarily mean the end of your work life. Depending on your physical and mental health, you may prefer to continue working because you enjoy what you do, want the social engagement, want to fulfil commitments, need the money, or want a “normal” routine.

Whatever your reasons, you will need to consider how work fits in with your changing physical abilities and your treatment. Your boss and workplace may give you the flexibility you need. If not, something else may suit you.

If your reason for working is more than financial you may find some satisfaction in volunteering or community work.

If you cannot work but want to be involved you may consider studying or learning a skill for the fun of it (eg. pottery or art class) or joining or starting a book club or Scrabble group.

Your leisure time may become even more important to you. Holidaying, eating out and going to shows, movies and sports events may boost your emotional and social wellbeing.

What may help

Talk to your boss

All workplaces are different and not all will be flexible and understanding, but you can never be sure until you ask. Many bosses will do anything for a valued worker, so if you are open about how your illness may affect you and your work, they may well fit around you.



Q&A

Q: Am I legally entitled to keep my job, even if my cancer is affecting how I do it?

A: This depends on your individual situation, but there are laws to protect workers from unfair dismissal, unlawful termination and disability discrimination. So, if you think you have been unjustly treated, you may want to seek specific legal advice. Most states have a workplace rights advocate, or you can try the Federal Workplace Ombudsman (www.wo.gov.au)

Talk to an occupational therapist

Your doctor or local hospital should be able to refer you to an occupational therapist who can advise you on what work and activities may suit you.

Check your finances

Try to let your health and state of mind and not your bank account, influence your work decisions but stopping or reducing your work may have a financial impact. See Chapter 5 (pg 78) for information on what financial assistance may be available.

Read the fine print

Before you book any holidays, check with a good travel agent for travel insurance that will cover your needs. Also, pay close attention to itineraries to ensure you are not too far from reliable medical facilities.

It is also worth checking the cancellation policies on tickets for travel and events, just in case you are not well enough to attend.

Plan your play

Your friends and family may not always remember or recognise your limitations, make sure they are aware of what you can manage when planning holidays and outings. Beware of over-committing yourself for fear of upsetting other people's plans, because that may only cause more disruption in the end.

Remember that this may well be a time when your family and friends simply want to spend time with you, so any activities you suggest are likely to suit them too.

For more information

- If you are worried about your rights at work, try the website of the **Australian Government's Workplace Ombudsman, www.wo.gov.au**
This gives an overview of your rights and also provides links to other useful sites related to the workplace
- If you are looking to do unpaid community work, go to the **Volunteering Australia website, www.volunteeringaustralia.org** for details of your nearest volunteer resource centre, which can point you to appropriate organisations

Personal Notes

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