

Making the most of your food

Advice for patients and carers



Why have I been given this handout?

You may have a poor appetite or have been eating less due to feeling unwell. If you are not getting enough nutrition to meet your body's needs you will lose weight and could be at risk of malnutrition.

Malnutrition makes it more difficult for the body to fight illness and infection and can make us feel weak, tired and low in mood. To treat malnutrition we need to increase the energy (calories) and protein that we eat and drink.

This handout provides advice on increasing your intake using ordinary foods and by making simple changes to your meals, snacks and drinks. It is aimed at adults only and is not suitable for children

Although some of the foods and drinks in this leaflet may usually be considered unhealthy, they are recommended until your appetite and weight improve. These foods are 'energy-dense' and can help to reduce your risk of malnutrition.

Helpful tips

1

Try eating little and often. Aim for three small meals and two to three snacks between meals.

2

Avoid having drinks just before meals as they can make you feel full. Have drinks after your meal or between meals instead.

3

Allow plenty of time to eat your meals so that you are not rushing.

4

Try 'ready-meals' if you have difficulty cooking or preparing meals, either bought from the supermarket or from a meal-delivery service.

5

Softer, moist foods can be easier to manage, especially if you are feeling tired.

6

Some fresh air and gentle exercise may help stimulate your appetite.

Fortified milk

Aim to have one pint of fortified milk each day in place of normal milk. You can use it in tea, coffee, on cereal, in cooking, or on its own. To make fortified milk:

- Mix four tablespoons (50g) of skimmed milk powder into one pint of full-fat milk. Stir well.

One pint of fortified milk provides 540kcal, 37g protein

What foods should I choose?

Choose your favourite foods; eating foods you enjoy can help you eat more. Try to eat a variety of foods to make sure you get a range of nutrients.



Avoid foods that are labelled as: diet, sugar-free, fat-free, low-fat or reduced-fat – use full-fat dairy products and butter or margarine.

Frying food in butter or oil rather than baking or grilling will add extra energy.



Aim to have 2-3 portions of high protein foods every day, such as meat, fish, eggs, nuts, beans, lentils and cheese.

Aim to have 1-2 puddings each day. Try adding cream, custard, condensed milk or ice-cream or try milky puddings such as rice pudding. Creamy yoghurts, custard pots, mousses, crème caramels or individual trifles make a good snack.



Try to include fruit and vegetables in your diet. To increase the energy, you can add butter to vegetables, or cream, sugar or custard to fruit. Try having cheese sauce, white sauce, mayonnaise or salad cream with meals.

Cakes, biscuits, scones, pastries, crisps, chocolate and sweets, are all good snacks to provide extra energy (calories). Try flapjacks, teacakes or malt loaf with butter, scones with jam and cream or chocolate or cream-filled biscuits.



Cheese, nuts and dried fruit are all high in energy (calories) so snack on these when you can.

Spread peanut butter, chocolate spread, jam, honey or lemon curd generously on bread, toast, crackers or crumpets, in addition to butter or margarine.



Fortifying your food

Fortifying food means adding small amounts of other ordinary foods to your meals and snacks to increase the nutrition, especially calories and protein.

How to fortify some common foods

If you have:	Fortify by adding:
Cereal or porridge	Fortified milk, cream, full-fat or Greek yoghurt, honey, syrup, sugar, jam, dried fruit
Scrambled eggs	Butter, fortified milk, grated cheese
Soups and stews	Grated cheese, cream, dumplings or croutons
Mashed potato	Butter, olive oil, fortified milk, grated cheese, skimmed milk powder or double cream
Cooked vegetables	Grated cheese, cream cheese or creamy sauces, olive oil, butter, mayonnaise or salad cream
Salads	Grated cheese, olive oil or salad dressing, mayonnaise or salad cream
Custard and milky puddings	Skimmed milk powder, double cream, condensed milk, honey, syrup, sugar, jam or dried fruit

If you are not able to follow this advice or you have been following it and you are still losing weight, please contact your GP or nurse for further advice.

Calories and protein provided by common foods

Food	Amount	Energy	Protein
Butter	10g 'pat'	75 kcal	0g
Cheese, grated	1 tablespoon	62kcal	4g
Condensed milk	1 tablespoon	66 kcal	1.5g
Double cream	1 tablespoon	75kcal	0.5g
Olive oil	1 teaspoon	45kcal	0g
Skimmed milk powder	1 tablespoon	44 kcal	4.5g
Sugar	1 teaspoon	20 kcal	0g

Contact NHS Kernow

✉ kccg.prescribing@nhs.net

🌐 www.kernowccg.nhs.uk



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