

Food first

Advice for adults with a small appetite

Why have I received 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. It can make us feel weak, tired and low in mood. To treat malnutrition we need to increase the energy or calories, protein and overall nutrients 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. 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.

If you have diabetes, it is preferable to fortify your food with protein and fats rather adding extra sugar or including more sugary foods. This will help to minimise the impact on your blood glucose levels. If you normally check your blood glucose levels and further to making these dietary changes find that they are higher than your target range, please contact your GP or diabetes nurse for advice regarding your diabetes management. Please read our [food first diabetes leaflet](#) for more information.

Helpful tips

1

Try eating little and often.

2

Aim for 3 small meals and 2 to 3 snacks between meals.

3

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

4

Allow plenty of time to eat and take your time.

5

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

6

Softer, moist foods can be easier to manage, especially if you feel weak or tired.

7

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

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.

Aim to have food high in protein in 2 or 3 meals each day. Good sources of protein include meat, fish, eggs, lentils and beans, dairy foods such as milk, yoghurt, cheese and milky puddings, nuts, seeds and nut butters, soya, tofu and other plant based meat alternatives.

Include dairy foods or dairy alternatives. Choose full fat varieties. If using plant based milk alternatives pick the ones highest in calories and protein.

Avoid foods that are labelled as diet, sugar-free, fat-free, low-fat or reduced-fat.

Include a variety of fruit and vegetables in your diet. You can add extra calories and protein by adding butter, cheese or sauces to vegetables, or custard or cream to fruit.

Aim to have starchy foods such as cereals, potatoes, bread and rice at every meal. You can add extra calories and protein by fortifying these foods, see ideas below.

Makes sure you stay well hydrated by aiming to have 8 cups or glasses of fluid per day. Make the most of your drinks by choosing nourishing drinks, see below.



Fortified milk

To make fortified milk you need 1 pint of full fat milk and 4 tablespoons of skimmed milk powder.

- Add a small amount of full fat milk to 4 tablespoons (50 grams) of skimmed milk powder and mix well to make a smooth paste.
- Gradually add the remaining whole milk and stir well.
- Provides 540 calories and 37 grams protein for 1 pint of fortified milk.

Full-cream milk powder, for example Nido®, can be used instead of skimmed milk powder. This provides 625 calories and 33 grams protein for 1 pint fortified milk using the same method as above.

Aim to have 1 pint of fortified milk each day in place of your usual milk.

- Use in hot and cold drinks such as milky coffee, hot chocolate, milkshakes and add to tea and coffee.
- Use at breakfast on cereal or in porridge, in pancakes, omelettes or scrambled eggs.
- Use in soups, sauces, mashed potato and Yorkshire puddings.
- Use in puddings such as rice pudding, semolina, custard.



Nourishing snacks

Aim for at least 2 snacks a day. A range of both sweet and savoury snacks, depending on taste, are ideal. Try some of the snacks below.

Savoury snacks

- Cheese scone with butter.
- Toast, crumpets or crackers with pate, peanut butter, cheese, cream cheese, houmous or avocado.
- Slice of cheese on toast or beans on toast
- Boiled egg.
- Croissant or pancakes filled with cream cheese and ham or smoked salmon.
- Savoury nibbles, for example cheese crackers, crisps (soft options include Quavers, Wotsits or Skips), popcorn.
- Chilled snacks, for example mini sausage roll, mini quiche, mini pork pie, cocktail sausages, scotch egg.
- Half a sandwich with chicken, chopped meat, tuna or egg mayonnaise.
- Cheese with grapes or apple.

Sweet snacks

- Individual desserts, for example full-fat mousse, cheesecake, trifle pot, crème brulee, rice pudding, jelly or custard.
- Yogurts, for example full-fat or Greek yoghurt, thick and creamy yogurt.
- Handful of nuts and dried fruit.
- Fruit such as banana and custard, tinned fruit with cream, or evaporated or condensed milk.
- Scoop of ice cream with whipped cream, sauce and sprinkles.
- Slice of cake, flapjack, croissant or Danish pastry.
- 2-3 biscuits, shortbread, digestives, cream or jam-filled or chocolate biscuits.
- Saffron bun, hot cross bun, slice of malt loaf or teacake with butter.
- Scone with jam and cream or jam tart with cream.
- Chocolate bar or a few squares of chocolate.
- Crumpet, toast or scotch pancake with butter and jam, cream, marmalade, honey, syrup, lemon curd, chocolate spread, peanut butter.

Top recommended snack

Fortified thick and creamy yogurt. Provides 300 calories and 10 grams of protein. Mix 1 heaped tablespoon of dried skimmed milk powder and 1 tablespoon of double cream with a 150 grams of thick and creamy yogurt. Stir well.

Nourishing drinks

Make the most of your drinks and avoid filling up on low calorie drinks such as tea, coffee, herbal teas, Bovril, broth-style soups, squash or diet fizzy drinks.

Good choices for nourishing drinks include milky drinks, especially if made using fortified milk. These include hot chocolate, milky coffee, malted milk drinks such as Ovaltine or Horlicks and milkshakes. Smoothies and fruit juice are also nourishing drinks. Milkshakes, smoothies and iced coffees can be homemade or purchased ready-made.

Please [try some of our homemade fortified drinks](#) which are high in calories and protein. Over the counter nutritional supplements such as Complan and Meritene can be purchased in most major supermarkets and pharmacies.



Fortifying your food

Fortifying food means adding small amounts of other ordinary foods to your meals and snacks. If you have a small appetite or are losing weight, fortifying your food can add more energy and protein.

How to fortify some common foods

If you have:	Fortify by adding:
Cereal or porridge	Full fat or full cream milk*, fortified milk*, skimmed milk powder*, cream, full-fat or Greek yoghurt*, ground nuts*, honey, syrup, sugar, jam, dried fruit, pureed fruit
Bread, toast, crackers or crumpets	Butter, spreads, cheese*, peanut butter*, cream cheese, avocado, chocolate spread, jam, honey, lemon curd
Scrambled eggs	Fortified milk*, grated cheese*, butter
Sauces	Butter, fortified milk*, grated cheese*, skimmed milk powder*, cream, yoghurt*, evaporated milk
Soups and stews	Grated cheese*, skimmed milk powder*, chopped meat*, beans or pulses*, ground nuts or nut butters*, cream, crème fraiche, dumplings or croutons
Mashed potato	Fortified milk*, grated cheese*, cream cheese, butter, oil, skimmed milk powder*, cream, crème fraiche
Cooked vegetables	Grated cheese*, cream cheese, creamy sauces, olive oil, butter, mayonnaise, salad cream, pesto sauce, crème fraiche
Sandwiches, pittas, bagels	Try high protein fillings such as meat*, cheese*, fish* or peanut butter*. Add extra butter, mayonnaise, salad cream, cream cheese
Salads	Grated cheese*, olive oil, salad dressing, mayonnaise, salad cream, croutons, avocado, houmous*
Custard and milky puddings	Full fat or full cream milk*, fortified milk*, skimmed milk powder*, cream, evaporated or condensed milk, honey, syrup, sugar, jam, dried fruit, pureed fruit, chocolate sauce

* Higher protein options - try to regularly fortify with these.

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 healthcare professional for further advice.

Contact NHS Kernow

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