



OvarianCancerAustralia

Ovarian Cancer — The Journey

Staying well

An information sheet for women with ovarian cancer, their family and friends

Having cancer and undergoing treatment for cancer can be tough on just about every part of your body. This sheet will introduce you to simple ideas for healthy eating, staying active and managing fatigue that may help you to feel healthier and boost your energy levels while you are on this journey.

www.ovariancancer.net.au 1300 660 334

Healthy eating

Eating a diet filled with many different healthy foods can help in many ways when you have ovarian cancer:

- It helps your body to cope better with the side effects of treatment so that you feel better, sooner.
- It helps wounds and tissue to heal after surgery, chemo and radiotherapy.
- It helps your body to fight infection.
- It boosts energy levels and helps you to feel stronger.

But cancer and its treatment can often make healthy eating a bit of a challenge — especially when you feel nauseous, you're constipated, or you've just plain lost your appetite.

That's when a dietician can be a great help: working with you to find foods and eating patterns that can help ease your symptoms AND make eating a joy again. If you're having any problems with eating, ask your doctor or oncology nurse for an appointment with a dietician.

Building blocks for healthy eating

Eat small meals or snacks, often. These are easier to digest and will help keep up energy levels. Six small meals a day is often better than three large ones.

Plant foods should make up the biggest part of your diet: vegies, fruit, wholegrain breads and cereals and legumes. (Talk to a dietician first if you are having problems such as constipation or diarrhoea, as you may need to eat more or less fibre to help.)

Go easy on fatty, highly processed foods that don't do anything for your overall health and may make you more nauseas or constipated.

Choose a range of colourful foods — orange, red, yellow, green; to help ensure that you are getting many different nutrients.

Include canned or fresh fish a couple of times a week. It's very easy to prepare and digest and full of nutrients that your body needs.

Eggs, very lean red meat and skinless chicken are also good protein choices.

When you don't feel like eating

Nausea, certain medicines, being less active and feeling tired or

“Eat small and frequent meals : ice-cream and toast worked for me.”

Wanda



depressed can all make eating much less attractive. Try these ideas to give your appetite a bit of a nudge:

Being active helps stimulate your appetite and keeps your bowel moving. Always talk to your doctor about what level of exercise is OK for your stage of recovery.

A small glass of wine, sherry or stout before or during your meal may help to increase your appetite — but always check this out with your doctor first, as some medicines and treatments may not mix well with alcohol.

Try protein drinks or shakes to give you essential nutrients and energy when you can't face solid food. Adding skim milk powder to your soups and drinks can boost your protein intake.

You may find that **softer, cooler or frozen foods** are more appealing. Try yoghurt, milkshakes, smoothies or frozen yoghurt.

Stock up on simple, nutritious snacks, so that when you feel like eating, there's something within easy reach. Good snacking ideas include nuts and dried fruit, toasted fruit loaf, bread or crackers spread with chocolate and hazelnut spread, peanut butter or cream cheese, mini fruit snack packs, mini yoghurts or custard.

Say 'yes please' when friends and family offer to cook for you, and let them know the sorts of things you do and don't feel like eating at the moment.

Nausea and vomiting

Nausea and vomiting are commonly caused by cancer and by

its treatment. It's really important to get some food into your tummy, because not eating anything can make you feel even worse. These ideas might help:

Salty foods can often help with nausea — try dry, salty crackers or pretzels.

Fizzy drinks can also help, especially dry ginger ale or ginger beer, which have the extra anti-nausea benefit of ginger.

Eat small amounts often and slowly — and try to eat before you get too hungry.

Try foods and drinks at cooler temperatures, as hotter foods and drinks may make nausea worse. Heat also increases food smells, which can make nausea worse.

Ask your doctor about anti-nausea medicines to help. Always talk to your doctor if nausea and vomiting aren't getting any better.

Constipation

Constipation may be caused by anti-nausea or pain relief medicines. It can also be a result of moving around less when you are unwell, or the cancer affecting your bowel.

Drink plenty of liquids — try for around 8 glasses of clear liquids a day.

Do something active every day, even if it's just a gentle walk around the block. Always talk to your doctor about what level of exercise is OK for your stage of recovery.

Talk to a dietician about increasing the fibre in your diet.



If simple self-help ideas don't work, talk to your doctor, nurse or dietician about recommending a suitable laxative.

Keep moving

A physiotherapist will see you while you are in hospital and help you work out a plan of activity that will help your recovery without putting strain on your wound.

Once you are home, you can gradually add more activity into your day. Being active helps to boost your energy levels, decrease fatigue, relieve stress, help constipation, increase your appetite and reduce anxiety and depression. All very important when you are recovering from cancer and having chemo.

Always talk to your doctor or physio if you are unsure if a certain activity will still be OK for you, or if you are well enough to start exercising again.

Walking, swimming and water exercise classes are gentle activities that many women feel comfortable with when they are recovering from ovarian cancer. You will need to start very slowly and gradually increase your activity level.

If you're looking for a new activity to try or would like to do something active in a group, ask at your treatment hospital or local community health centre.

Living with fatigue

Fatigue is a very common problem for women with ovarian cancer, both during treatment and beyond.

Fatigue is a complex thing and can have many different causes: it is

often a side effect of chemo, radiotherapy or medicines, can be caused by the cancer itself, or may result from difficulty sleeping or eating, pain, infection, emotional distress, anaemia and being less active. Travelling to and from chemo, going back to work and caring for a house and family can all eat up your available energy.

Many women expect to feel very tired during treatment, but may be surprised when that weary, worn-out feeling continues. Some women find that it takes 1-2 years to feel really well again.

Realising that this tiredness is normal and asking for help are important first steps in coping with it. If ongoing fatigue is a problem, it's important to talk to your doctor: there may be some causes that you haven't thought of that you can address. In the meantime, these simple ideas have helped other women feel a little less exhausted:

Ask for support and help

whenever you can. Once you've finished chemo, friends and family may think you're ready to do it all on your own — you're not. People often find it difficult to know how to help, so be specific. Tell your good friend that the best help in the world would be a pot of soup... or to pick the kids up from school this week... or to take a basket of ironing. If the situation was reversed, you would be relieved to know that you could provide exactly the help that your friend needs.



It's easy to focus on what you can't do. Instead, **switch your thinking to what you have achieved each day** and how far you have come. Some days that may be returning a phone call or walking to the local shop to buy a paper.

Your body and mind are in survival mode. **Nurture yourself in every way you can.** Do the little things that make you feel good, like having a laugh with friends, spending time in the garden with children or grandchildren or going for a walk with your partner or a friend.

Housework, shopping and cooking are way down the bottom of the priority list right now. Sure, everyone in the house still needs to eat and wear clothes, but you can relax your standards and delegate more.

We've already mentioned (a couple of times) that **keeping active really does help your energy levels.** We won't tell you again!

Try keeping an energy diary, where you jot down how much energy you have on a scale of 0-10 at different times of the day. Write down what you were doing at the time, what you recently ate or drank and any medicine you took. This may help you to see some patterns and allow you to make

the most of times when you know your energy levels will be higher. It may also help you to pinpoint activities that sap your energy.

Sources used for this information sheet

Food and Cancer: A guide to nutrition for people with cancer

Available from the NSW Cancer Council www.cancercouncil.com.au or by calling 13 11 20

Gynaecological Cancer Support www.gynaecancersupport.org.au

Choose the 'Women's virtual community' and then click on the 'Treatment' tab for lots of helpful information on subjects like fatigue, early menopause and hair loss. You need to register to use this site, but there's no charge.

Other helpful Ovarian Cancer Australia information sheets

Other Ovarian Cancer Australia information on different areas of staying well include:

[Coping with chemotherapy](#)

[Complementary therapies](#)

You can download these sheets from www.ovariancancer.net.au

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Please note: The information in this sheet is not medical advice and is not intended to replace the advice of your health care professional.