



Dietary advice for adults with head and neck cancer undergoing radiotherapy

Introduction

This leaflet gives you information about what to eat and drink when you are having radiotherapy to the head and neck. You may want to share this leaflet with whoever else provides food for you. This leaflet does not replace the discussion between you and a dietitian but helps you to understand more about what is discussed.

When having radiotherapy to the head or neck, it is important that you maintain your weight so that your radiotherapy mask fits well and the treatment isn't interrupted. During radiotherapy, eating and drinking will become more difficult therefore dietary advice aims to provide adequate nutrition in order to help prevent muscle and weight loss. It may also help to minimise the side effects of treatment and enable you to heal quicker once the radiotherapy has finished.

During radiotherapy and for some time afterwards, you are likely to have some of the following side effects:

- A poor appetite
- Pain or difficulty chewing
- Pain or difficulty swallowing
- A dry mouth
- Increase in mucous produced in the mouth and throat
- Thick sticky secretions in your mouth
- Taste changes
- Mouth ulcers
- Tiredness
- Nausea

The aim of this leaflet is to provide you with dietary advice to help manage your symptoms which includes a high protein, high energy diet. It will talk about:

- Changing the texture of your food
- Useful dietary tips
- How to add extra nourishment to your food
- Nutritional supplements

A high protein and energy diet will help the body to repair, maintain muscle strength and maintain a healthy immune system during radiotherapy treatment and recovery afterwards.

Changing the texture of your food

As your symptoms progress and it becomes more difficult to eat and drink, you may find changing the texture of your diet allows you to eat more. Your dietitian will discuss with you the appropriate texture of diet depending on your symptoms e.g. moist, mashable diet, pureed diet or liquid diet. If you have seen a speech and language therapist who has recommended a certain texture of diet, please follow their recommendation.

You may find the following equipment and tips useful when preparing everyday foods.

- Liquidiser, food processor, hand blender or smoothie maker- to make food into a soft, puree or liquid texture
- Sieve, masher or fork to remove lumps
- Adding extra liquid, sauces or gravy to food helps to make food moist and easier to swallow. You could: - Use full fat milk, cream, stock, gravy or other sauces instead of water when pureeing or liquidising food. This will make the food more nourishing and improves taste

Avoid rough or dry textures like crackers or bread as this will dry your mouth out and will be difficult to chew and swallow. Aim to keep your meals as soft and moist as possible. When blending or liquidising, it is important to remove any difficult textures of food e.g. skin, bones, fat and gristle from meat and fish. You should:

- Cook or stew meat until tender
- Stew and/or mash fruits and vegetables. Remove pips and skin and cook vegetables and fruits well
- To make your food seem more attractive, puree different foods separately to avoid mixing different coloured foods
- Sip water between mouthfuls

Supermarkets provide a range of soft meals, which you may find easier to eat and simpler to prepare. It may be that you just need to add some extra sauce to these meals. It is also possible to buy ready-made soft or pureed meals, which can be delivered to your home. Please ask your dietitian or nurse for information.

Useful dietary tips

- Try to have small frequent meals and snacks throughout the day. Aim to eat something every two to three hours
- Snacks could include yogurts, rice puddings, mousses, individual soft cheese portions or savoury dips (such as houmous and cheese dips)
- Have your main meal at the time of day you feel most well/ hungry
- Try to have high protein foods such as meat, fish, egg, cheese, beans, lentils, dahl, meat substitute such as Quorn or supermarket own brand, at least three times a day
- Aim for 1 pint of full fat or fortified milk each day (recipe on the next page)
- Aim for 2000mls of water each day and try to take a drink at least every hour. You may find it useful to carry a bottle of water around with you so that you can drink constantly - this will help with a dry mouth or throat
- Keep a supply of easily prepared foods e.g. tinned meats and fish, soft ready-made meals, soups and instant puddings. You may want to freeze small portions of ready-made foods to have throughout your treatment
- Avoid food with very hot or cold temperatures, spicy, heavily seasoned and acidic foods e.g. fruit juice, vinegar, tomatoes as these may be painful and will irritate your mouth or throat further
- Limit alcohol and caffeinated drinks as this can dry your mouth further

How to add extra nourishment to your foods

Fortify milk Add 4 tablespoons of milk powder (25g) (e.g. marvel or supermarkets own brand) into 1 pint of full fat milk.

1 pint fortified milk = 470kcal, 28g protein.

Use this milk in tea, coffee, milky drinks, milky puddings, cereal, soups and sauces. Keep this in the fridge and discard after 24 hours.

Fortifying foods

Breakfast cereals - prepare with full fat milk or fortified milk. Add extra cream, yogurt, sugar or jam. Porridge or Weetabix may need to be quite runny.

Soft/mashable foods - add cream, butter or margarine, soft cheese, grated cheese or full fat fromage frais to food such as mash potatoes, cottage pie and fish pie.

Soups - add grated cheese, noodles, pasta, cream, milk powder or evaporated milk.

Sauces (homemade or packet) - add cheese, cream, milk powder, ghee, butter, margarine or smooth peanut butter.

Vegetables - add butter, ghee oil, margarine, cream or coconut milk.

Fruits - add custard, yogurt, ice cream, evaporated milk or cream.

Meal Examples:

Breakfast

- Scrambled eggs
- Porridge or instant oats with golden syrup or honey
- Wheat biscuits with full fat or fortified milk
- Pot of Greek yogurt with a mashed banana

Lunch

- Cheesy omelette
- Blended soups with extra cream or milk powder
- Fishcakes with crème fraiche
- Lentil dhal

Evening meal

- Blended meat casseroles or stews with mashed potatoes
- Risotto
- Macaroni cheese
- Cheese and potato pie
- Cauliflower cheese with sweet potato and swede mash
- Fish (mashed or pureed) in sauce with mashed potatoes
- Corned beef hash (mashed or pureed)

- Cottage or shepherd's pie with extra gravy
- Quorn curry (not spicy) with rice
- The inside of a jacket potato with baked beans and cheese
- Bolognese sauce with mashed potato Include mashed or pureed vegetables with the above with added butter and/or cheese

Desserts

- Stewed fruit with cream
- Mashed bananas and custard
- Rice, tapioca or semolina pudding
- Sponge and custard
- Cheesecake
- Tiramisu
- Panna cotta

Snack suggestions

- Yogurt/fromage frais
- Rice pudding pots/trifles
- Mousses
- Cheese triangles
- Crème caramels
- Jelly with ice cream
- Ice cream or sorbet
- Instant whip
- Fruit fool
- Custard pot
- Mashed avocado
- Pasta cup made with hot water
- Houmous with avocado slices

Drink Ideas

- Fortified milk 250mls
- Horlicks/Ovaltine (25g) serving made with 200mls fortified milk
- Hot chocolate (11g) made with 250mls fortified milk
- Mars/Galaxy/Frijj/Yazoo milkshakes 350mls
- Yogurt/Yop drinks 350mls
- Complan made with full fat milk
- Meritene shake
- Meritene soup
- Lucozade/sports drink (380mls)
- Oral nutritional supplements

Once you start radiotherapy treatment often your dietitian will write to your GP to ask them to prescribe oral nutritional supplements for you. These are normally low volume, high energy and high protein supplement drinks that can help you to meet your energy and protein requirements throughout radiotherapy treatment and into recovery, e.g. Fortisip, Ensure, Fresubin, Aymes shake.

Unopened oral nutritional supplements can be stored in a cool dry place e.g. cupboard, shelf or spare room. Do not store next to a radiator or in direct sunlight. If you are storing supplements in a shed or garage in the winter months, they may be at risk of freezing.

Before opening check they are in date and give the bottle/carton a good shake.

Many of the oral nutritional supplements are best served cold. Try putting your daily requirement for supplements in the fridge the night before they are needed.

Once opened oral nutritional supplements can be stored in the fridge for up to 24 hours.

An opened oral nutritional supplement left at room temperature should be used within 4 hours. If you cannot take the dose of oral nutritional supplement recommended you should speak with your dietitian, doctor or nurse for further advice and suggestions.

Ask your dietitian for information on oral nutritional supplement recipe ideas.

Sustainability

Some of our patients ask questions about sustainability. The dietitian can provide you with further information if needed. A quick and easy tip is to try to choose seasonal/local foods, look for foods with minimal packaging. Try to minimise your food waste by planning meals, cooking in bulk/batches and only buying what you need.

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