

Information resources for families

High-energy food and drinks

when receiving treatment for cancer

Most children on treatment will have a poor appetite at some stage, or they may have problems with weight loss or slow growth. A diet high in energy (kilojoules) may be necessary.

While getting enough energy to grow is important, so is eating a balanced diet that provides plenty of nutrients such as protein, fat, vitamins and minerals. This means including foods each day from the following groups:

- bread and cereals including rice, pasta, noodles, bread and breakfast cereal
- fruits and vegetables including fresh, frozen, tinned or dried
- meat and meat alternatives including meat, fish, chicken, eggs, nuts and legumes like baked beans or lentils
- milk and dairy foods including cream, cheese and yoghurt
- fats and oils including margarine, butter, oil and cream.

There are two ways to increase the energy in your child's diet: increase the energy content of the food being eaten, or eat more food.

To increase the energy content of food

The following can be added:

Margarine or butter – melt over vegetables, rice and pasta. Spread thickly on bread or toast. Spread on sweet and savoury biscuits.



Oil – fry foods where possible and stir fry vegetables. Try fried rice. Use oil to baste if grilling food and use oil-based salad dressing.

Mayonnaise – use on sandwiches or mix with tuna or egg to use on dry biscuits. Use as a salad dressing or serve with fishcakes or fish fingers. Do not use raw egg products when your child is neutropenic.

Cheese – add grated cheese to soups, pasta, casseroles, mashed potato, egg dishes, tinned spaghetti, baked beans or melted on vegetables. Use cream cheese in dips or spread on biscuits or bread.

Cream – add to milk, breakfast cereals, desserts, custard, yoghurt, sauces and soups.

Milk – make soups and puddings with milk instead of water. Add full-cream milk powder to milk to use for drinks and in cooking.

Sauces – use gravies and sauces on vegetables and meat dishes. Add sweet sauces and toppings to ice cream and other desserts.

Glucose polymer – this is a tasteless carbohydrate polymer that can be added to food and drink to increase the energy content.

Tips for making meal times more enjoyable

To help your child eat well, it is important to make meal times as relaxed and happy as possible. Try the following ideas:

- Serve the main meal when your child is hungry – this might be at lunchtime for infants and toddlers. Be flexible.
- Three small meals and three snacks between meals can help to improve appetite and food intake.
- Try a dessert after main meals.
- Look at how much fluid your child drinks at mealtimes. Try separating drinks from meals to increase the amount eaten, and don't offer drinks shortly before meals. Avoid lots of sweet drinks such as juice, cordial and lemonade.
- Tempt your child with fancy drinking straws, decorated cups and plates and vegetables and sandwiches cut in various shapes.
- A change of venue such as a picnic outside or on the floor sometimes helps.
- Make mealtimes as relaxed as possible without distractions such as television. Try to get all the family to eat together.
- Be patient – hardest of all!

Foods to avoid

It is fine to have treats such as lollies, chocolates and takeaway foods. However, eating too many of these foods will fill your child up leaving little room for more nutritious food.

High-energy snack ideas

Savoury foods

- Soup – choose creamy varieties made with milk rather than water. Serve with toast and lots of butter.
- Toast – top with mashed avocado, cream cheese or grilled cheese. Use lots of margarine or butter.
- Muffin pizzas – spread toasted muffin with tomato paste and then top with ham, onion, capsicum, pineapple and lots of grated cheese and grill.
- Two minute noodles – make sure you use the higher fat varieties. Add extra margarine or oil or grated cheese.

- Sausages or frankfurts in bread with tomato sauce.
- Hot chips.
- Mashed potato and gravy.
- Jacket potatoes – bake in the microwave and then top with sour cream, baked beans, cheese, butter, avocado or the lot!
- Baked beans on toast – use lots of butter on the toast and then top baked beans with grated cheese.
- Garlic bread.
- Party pies and sausage rolls.
- Toasted sandwiches with butter on both sides.
- Croissants with ham and cheese.
- Eggs on toast.
- Jaffles filled with ham, cheese and tomato, leftover casseroles or baked beans. Use lots of butter or margarine.

Sweet foods

- Pancakes with lemon and sugar or butter and jam.
- Crumpets with lots of margarine or butter and honey.
- Raisin toast – with lots of margarine or butter.
- Muffins – spread with lots of butter or margarine and then add ham, honey or peanut butter.
- Croissants with butter and jam.
- Self saucing puddings and cream. Look for the instant puddings in the supermarket.
- Hot chocolate with marshmallows.
- Hot custard with chopped banana or tinned fruit.
- Scones with jam and cream.
- Ice cream – try it in a cone with topping or sprinkles.
- Doughnuts or iced buns.



High-energy drink ideas

Sometimes adding extra kilojoules to your child's drinks can be easier than increasing solid food options. Here are some ideas:

Hot chocolate

- 1 cup of full-cream milk
- 1 tbsp cocoa
- 1 tbsp malted milk
- 2 tsp sugar
- Marshmallows

Combine cocoa, malted milk powder and sugar. Pour in ¼ of the milk, stirring to form a smooth paste. Gradually stir in remaining milk and heat. Pour into a cup and top with marshmallows.

Fruit smoothie

- 1 cup full-cream milk
 - 1 scoop ice cream
 - 1 banana or ½ cup fresh strawberries or ½ cup of peaches
- Blend all ingredients

Fortified milk

- 1 cup full-cream milk
 - 2 tbsp full-cream milk powder
- Mix together and use this for milkshakes, on cereal and for milky desserts such as custard.

Basic milkshake

- 200ml full-cream milk
- 2 scoops ice cream
- Flavouring/topping

Try adding these to milkshakes:

- glucose polymer, such as Polyjoule™ or Polycose™
- Sustagen™
- Milo™
- yoghurt
- honey
- cream
- Pediasure™
- Nutrini Drink™
- Ensure™

High-energy milkshake

- 200ml full-cream milk
- 2 scoops ice cream
- 1 tbsp cream
- 1 tbsp full-cream milk powder
- Flavouring/topping

Sustagen™ shake

- 200ml full-cream milk
- 2 scoops Sustagen™ powder
- 2 tbsp ice cream
- 1 tbsp chocolate topping



Try these flavour ideas:

- choc-berry – chocolate and strawberry topping
- choc-banana – chocolate and banana topping or fresh banana
- flake – crumbled flake bar and chocolate fudge sauce
- choc-honeycomb – crushed honeycomb and chocolate fudge sauce
- caramel – grated white chocolate and caramel fudge sauce
- fruit smoothie – banana and honey, frozen berries, mango, apricot

If recommended by your dietitian, here are some ways you can use glucose polymer in food and drinks:

Adding glucose polymer to food and drinks

Add 1–2 tablespoons of glucose polymer to a glass of juice/milk/cordial or savoury liquids like soup.

You can make a concentrated solution by mixing five scoops of glucose polymer with 200ml of water and add to cordials/jellies/mousse etc. You can also use this solution in cooking.

Sprinkle and stir 1–2 tablespoons of glucose polymer into foods like breakfast cereal, tinned or pureed fruit, custard, yoghurt, mashed vegetables, stew, casserole, gravy and sauces.

Please note: If your child develops symptoms of acute gastroenteritis such as vomiting or diarrhoea, you should stop using glucose polymer for the duration of the illness.

Check with your dietitian if they can give you a discount prescription or register you on the Home Supplement program for some supplements.