

How to gain back weight after cancer treatment

Meagan Atcheson, a dietitian, shares foods to eat to regain weight after cancer treatment.

Cancer treatments, such as chemotherapy, radiation, and surgery, often lead to unintentional weight loss due to side effects, like nausea, loss of appetite, and difficulty swallowing.

Regaining weight after treatment is essential for recovery and rebuilding strength. However, it's not just about gaining weight but also about regaining muscle mass and nutritional balance.

Focus on kilojoule-dense foods that are rich in nutrients. Foods like nut butters, avocados, full-fat dairy products, and olive oil can help increase kilojoule intake without requiring large portions. Small, frequent meals can be easier to tolerate than three large meals. Including snacks, such as trail mix, cheese, or protein bars, can also help meet daily kilojoule goals.

Protein is crucial for repairing tissues and rebuilding muscle mass. Incorporate protein-rich foods, such as eggs, lean meats, legumes, tofu, and fish, into your diet.

Nutritional shakes or smoothies fortified with protein powders, healthy fats, and fruits can be a convenient option, especially if you have a low appetite. Plant-based protein sources, such as lentils and chickpeas, are excellent alternatives if you prefer vegetarian options.

To stimulate appetite, consider using mild herbs and spices, or consult your healthcare provider about appetite stimulants. If you experience persistent issues, such as nausea or difficulty swallowing, working with a dietitian or speech therapist can provide tailored strategies.

Staying hydrated is also essential, as dehydration can suppress appetite.

For those with persistent eating difficulties, nutritional supplements recommended by a healthcare provider may be necessary.

Remember, recovery is a gradual process. Regular follow-ups with a dietitian can ensure that nutritional needs are met, addressing any deficiencies or challenges that arise. Focusing on nutrient quality alongside quantity will ensure sustainable health improvements and a smoother recovery journey.

FOOD FOCUS

PROTEIN POWER

Foods high in protein (include as much as possible or small amounts five to six times a day)

Meat, fish, chicken, ostrich	Cottage cheese, cream cheese
Legumes – beans, lentils, chickpeas, hummus	Laughing Cow cheese wedges
Eggs	Soya products, soya burgers, edamame beans
Full cream milk, Nespray milk powder, soya milk	Tofu, chickpea pasta
Custard	Milkshakes, Milo, Lifegain Advanced Nutritional Supplement
Frozen yoghurt	Fortisip Compact Protein Sips
Ice cream	Fresubin 3.2kcal Drinks
Full cream yoghurt	Tinned fish (drained), fresh fish
Cheese	Futurelife protein bars
Futurelife high protein cereal	Nuts, seeds, peanut butter

NOTE:
Not all of these options will work for all individuals (diabetes, kidney problems, etc) so it's best to talk to your healthcare provider.

ELEVATE YOUR ENERGY

Foods high in energy (try to enrich foods with added energy)

Avocado pear	Peanuts and raisins
Peanut butter, nut butter	Brown rice, barley, couscous, quinoa
Mayonnaise	Whole-wheat pasta
100% fruit juice	Digestive biscuits, protein chocolate bars
Margarine, olive oil (can add extra to cooking and afterwards to foods like pasta and veg)	Lifegain Advanced Nutritional Supplement
Sugar	Starchy vegetables
Syrup, honey	Salad dressing
Nuts, seeds	Energy bars
Dried fruit, dark chocolate,	Pesto
Cereal bars	Chutney
Futurelife high protein cereal	Canned fruit, jelly

INVITE V AND M INTO YOUR LIFE

Foods high in vitamins and minerals

Fruit	Wholegrains, high-fibre starches
Vegetables	Vegetable and beans soups



MEET THE EXPERT

Meagan Atcheson is a registered dietitian who focuses specifically in oncology. She is a plant-centric foodie who promotes a nourishing approach to health and wellness using evidence-based research and guidelines only.