Improving appetite

If you have a poor appetite, it can be hard to eat enough food to stay well. Try these ideas to help keep you healthy and encourage your appetite to return.

Once your appetite has returned to normal, you can go back to eating a variety of healthy foods.

Eat regularly throughout the day

- When you have a poor appetite, it is easier to eat small meals more often than trying to eat only a few larger meals.
- For a smaller meal, try a creamy soup, or sandwiches with peanut butter, egg, cheese or cold meat.
- Treat food like medicine – it is very important! Try to eat at regular times, even if you are not hungry.
- Nutritious fluids such as soups, milk drinks and fruit juice may be easier to manage than solid food.

Choose high energy foods and drinks

- Make every mouthful count.
- Have regular snacks. Try crackers with cheese or dips, dried fruit and nuts, muffins, fruit cake or crumpets.
- Choose high energy drinks. Instead of filling up on water or tea, have milky drinks, fruit juices, cordial or soft drinks.
- Try to include foods high in protein with each meal and snack, such as meat, fish, egg or dairy products.
- Add extra fat to your meals, for example sauces, cheese, margarine and gravy to your foods (like mashed potato). Use full-cream dairy products rather than low fat.

Make eating enjoyable

- Eat meals with other people if you can.
- Listen to some music at mealtimes.
- Increase your appetite before a meal by going for a short walk or having a small glass of alcohol.
- Eat whenever you are hungry – even if it’s not a mealtime.

This general advice was accurate at the time of publication (April 2015). For more information about improving appetite and your individual needs, see your GP, or an accredited practising dietitian.