

Patient/carer information: Eating well for small appetites

Why do I need this advice?

Due to illness or a poor appetite you may be at risk of malnutrition because you cannot, or do not, eat enough to meet your body's needs.

Not eating enough can cause you to lose weight without trying to and/or for your weight to be too low.

Malnutrition increases risk of illness and makes it harder for the body to fight infection and heal itself, so it will take longer to recover from any illness. Malnutrition can also reduce energy levels, muscle strength and mobility.

Treating malnutrition can be very simple, and ordinary food can provide all the extra nutrition you need. This is called 'food based' treatment - it just means using ordinary foods to increase your intake of all nutrients.

What about healthy eating?

When someone has or is at risk of malnutrition, 'normal' healthy eating guidelines (eating a diet that is low in fat and sugar, avoiding snacking between meals etc) won't help them meet their needs.

The advice provided here is healthy eating for someone who is at risk of malnutrition.

What do I need to eat?

Our bodies need us to have a range of different foods every day.

These include:

- ◆ Starchy carbohydrate such as bread, pasta, rice, cereals, potatoes
- ◆ Protein such as meat, fish, eggs, nuts, beans/lentils, Quorn, soya such as tofu
- ◆ Milk and milk containing foods such as yogurt, fromage frais, cheese
- ◆ Fruit and vegetables
- ◆ Fluid

Aim to have:

- ◆ 3 meals and 2 – 3 small snacks in between your meals every day
- ◆ A serving of protein food and a serving of starchy food (see left for examples) at each meal
- ◆ 5 small portions of fruit and vegetables every day
- ◆ Snacks from the snack ideas listed below

Should I take a vitamin supplement?

If your appetite is very small or you find it difficult to eat enough to meet all your vitamin and mineral needs, you can purchase a [once-a-day multivitamin and mineral tablet](#).

Supermarket 'own brands' are good choices and do not cost as much as the "big brands".

Many pharmacies also stock 'own brands'.

How can I make my mealtimes easier?

If you have a small appetite, it can sometimes be difficult to eat enough. However, there are many simple changes that can help make sure that you can eat enough to meet your body's needs.

- ◆ If cooking is difficult for you or your carer, try ready prepared meals from the supermarket or delivered to your door e.g. Wiltshire Farm Foods (0800 077 3100 www.wiltshirefarmfoods.com) or Oakhouse Foods (0333 370 6700 www.oakhousefoods.co.uk) or Hertfordshire Independent Living Service (HILS) (0330 2000 103 www.hertsindependentliving.org).
- ◆ **Serve small portions** as these can be easier to manage than larger portions – you can always go back for a second helping
- ◆ Choose foods which you know you enjoy
- ◆ If you eat slowly, **give yourself enough time for each meal and snack**. To keep your food warm while you are eating try to serve hot food on a warmed plate or try commercially available heated dishes or plate warmers
- ◆ **Try to eat with others if you can**, as this can help to encourage your appetite.
- ◆ Try to make sure that where you eat is as pleasant for you as possible

Which snacks should I choose?

Try to have 2 - 3 small snacks each day in between your meals

Try to choose **nutrient dense snacks** (ones that contain lots of nutrients) such as:

Snack suggestion	Amount	Energy Content (Kcals)	Protein content (grams)
Cheese & cracker	1 cracker + 1 small chunk cheese	112	5.5
Cheese scone	1	161	5.8
Custard	150g tub	144	3.6
Falafal	1	111	3.8
Greek yoghurt	150g tub	198	9.2
Hard boiled egg	1	75	7.2
Mixed nuts	Small handful (40g)	246	8.6
Rice pudding	150g tub	141	4.7



What about drinks?

- ◆ All fluids count towards meeting your body's needs including tea, coffee, soft drinks, fruit juice, milk, water and low strength alcohol (less than 4%)
- ◆ Try to choose some nutrient dense drinks from the list below, in place of lower energy choices like water, tea, sugar free soft drinks such as squash or fizzy drinks

How much fluid should I drink?

- ◆ Women should aim to drink at least 1,600ml of fluid every day
= 3 pints/ 7 full standard size mugs/ 11 full tea cups
- ◆ Men should aim to drink at least 2,000ml fluid every day:
= 3½ pints/ 8 full standard size mugs/ 13—14 full tea cups

I don't drink that much usually, what should I do?

- ◆ Drinking enough is important to help you feel as well as you can, so try to gradually increase the amount you drink
- ◆ If you don't drink very much fluid, any increase in your intake is good
- ◆ Some people find it helpful to make a point of having a drink with each meal and snack, and to also have a full drink when they take their medications

Nutrient dense drinks per 200ml (1 small mug)	Energy Content (Kcals)	Protein content (grams)
Horlicks*	235	9
Ovaltine*	230	8.5
Milkshake*	200	7
Hot Chocolate*	180	7
Bournvita*	170	8.5
Cocoa*	168	7
Full fat milk	140	7
Milky coffee*	140	5
Fruit juice	65 – 120	0
Fruit smoothie	100	0.5

*made with full fat milk

Fortifying milk

You can add extra nutrition to full fat milk by adding skimmed milk powder to it

- ◆ Add 4 generous tablespoons (60 grams) skimmed milk powder to each pint (568ml) full fat milk
- ◆ Fortified milk can be used to make any of the milky drinks listed above, or can be used in tea and coffee or with breakfast cereal

How can I increase the nutrients in my food?

If you have a small appetite, fortifying foods - by adding extra energy, protein, vitamins and minerals to them - can make it easier for you to eat enough every day.

This table shows the everyday food items to use as fortifiers, and the amount of energy and protein that each will add:

Food fortifier	Quantity to add to 1 portion of food	Try adding to a portion of:	Energy content added per portion (Kcals)	Protein content added per portion (grams)
Almond butter	1 tablespoon (15g)	Porridge, soup, curry & dahl	98	3.4
Cashew butter	1 tablespoon (14g)	Porridge, soup, curry & dahl	94	2.8
Cheese, grated	1 tablespoon (10g)	Potatoes, vegetables, curry & dahl	40	2.5
Egg	1 egg	Custard, milk pudding, mashed potato	75	6
Dried, skimmed milk powder	1 tablespoon (15g)	Custard, milk pudding/sweets, 'cream of' soup, porridge, mashed potato	55	5.5
Greek yogurt	1 tablespoon (45g)	Porridge, pasta sauce, casserole, curry & dahl	61	2
Ground almonds	1 tablespoon (15g)	Vegetable soup, stew, casserole, porridge, curry & dahl	92	3
Peanut butter	1 tablespoon (15g)	Porridge, curry & dahl	94	4
Pea protein powder	1 tablespoon (17g)	Vegetable soup, stew, casserole, curry & dahl	60	11
Soy protein powder	1 tablespoon (14g)	Vegetable soup, stew, casserole, curry & dahl	50	14



Putting food based treatment into practice - Increasing your intake every day

People who are at risk of malnutrition usually need to increase their intake by another 500 calories per day (in addition to their current intake) using nutrient dense foods. This should be enough to stop or slow unplanned weight loss.

Increasing your intake by 500 calories per day can seem quite hard, but it actually only means making 3 - 4 changes to what you usually eat and drink each day.

The following are simple examples of how you can increase your intake by 500 calories per day using nutrient dense foods.

If you like milk and milk products – try having:	Energy added (Kcals)	Protein added (grams)
1 mug (200ml) of hot chocolate made with fortified milk	254	13
1 small tub of Greek yoghurt	198	9.2
1 tablespoon skimmed milk powder added to custard	55	5.5
Total	507	27.7

If you don't like or cannot take milk products or you like savoury flavours – try having:	Energy added (Kcals)	Protein added (grams)
1 small handful of mixed nuts	246	8.6
1 cheese scone	161	5.8
1 tablespoon pea protein powder added to vegetable soup	60	11
½ tablespoon peanut/cashew butter added to toast or	47	1.4
Total	514	26.8

If you like sweet flavours – try having:	Energy added (Kcals)	Protein added
1 mug (200ml) of hot chocolate made with fortified milk	254	13
1 tub (150g) of custard	146	4.2
2 tablespoons of Greek yoghurt (with honey)	122	4
Total	522	21.2

Following the advice in this leaflet should help you improve your food intake and support you to meet your body's needs.

If you are not able to follow this advice or you are still losing weight after a month of following this advice, contact your Dietitian, District or Practice Nurse

Leaflet provided by:

Profession:

Contact Number:

Date:

Version	1.0
Developed by	Alison Smith, Lead Prescribing Support Dietitian , Hertfordshire & West Essex ICB
Date ratified by MMC	July 2022
Review date	July 2025