

What to expect if you have a small appetite whilst in hospital

Practical information for
patients, relatives and carers
of adults



Information for patients,
relatives and carers

Eating and drinking during illness

Whilst in hospital recovering from an illness, or surgery, you may experience problems with eating such lack of appetite, lack of interest in food or nausea. This could be due to your illness, the treatment you are having or because of fear and anxiety during your admission.

You may only be able to manage small quantities of food at meal times and therefore may not be eating enough to meet your requirements.

Eating and drinking during a hospital admission is important as it will help:

- Fight infection
- Maintain weight
- Promote healing

Generally, you will feel better and be able to return home more quickly if you are able to eat well. Try to eat little and often when your appetite is poor eg. snacks between meals.

What nurses do to help

Nurses will identify which patients require specialist input from the dietitians by screening every patient for malnutrition risk. They may also record the amount of food eaten on a daily basis.

Nursing staff will ensure you are positioned correctly to make eating easier and that your food is accessible at mealtimes. If required, you will receive assistance with eating and may have your meal served on a red or yellow tray.

If you feel you are not getting enough help, please ask to speak to the nurse in charge.

If you are struggling to find suitable options on the menus or if you are still hungry and require snacks between meals, please inform the nurse who is caring for you.

Menus

If appropriate, you will be given a fortified menu to choose your meals from at Frimley Park Hospital and on other sites, higher energy options are coded on the menus. The food choices on these menus contain more calories and protein than items on the standard menu. Examples of higher energy foods offered, are porridge, mousses and jelly's. The purpose of this menu is to provide extra nutrition in a small volume of food.

Some of the advice given may contradict healthy eating guidelines, however increasing calorie and protein intake will aid your recovery and help you regain strength quicker, which is the most important aspect of your diet during this time.

What dietitians do to help

Dietitians are available to see you if you have been identified by the medical staff as needing specific advice for your illness or medical condition. If you require further advice after discharge, dietitians can arrange to see you in an outpatient clinic or request that you are seen in the community.

What is a supplement drink?

You may be given a nutritional supplement drink (e.g. Fortisip Compact Protein or Ensure Plus) between meals. These are similar to milkshakes, but contain calories, protein, vitamins and minerals. Nutritional supplement drinks are best sipped slowly over an hour or so. It is important to try and have at least some of it, even if you can't manage the whole bottle. If you would like to try different flavours, please ask your ward host or nursing staff.

What can relatives, friends and carers do to help?

- Bring in snacks for between meals that can be kept safely at the bedside e.g. sweet or savoury biscuits, chocolate, crisps, cake.
- Please do not bring in any items that require refrigeration or heating up on the ward as this is not permitted due to food safety and food hygiene reasons.

How can relatives and friends help at mealtimes?

Our wards have 'protected mealtimes' so that patients can eat their meals uninterrupted.

Rather than being helped by nursing staff at mealtimes, some patients eat better when a friend, relative or carer is there to assist them.

All wards welcome anyone who can come in and help their relative or friend during mealtimes. Please ensure you inform the nurse looking after the patient as there may be safety reasons why the patient requires help from a registered professional.

Relatives, friends or carers can make a real difference to the patient's recovery by helping in this way.

If you have swallowing difficulties or dietary allergen requirements or cultural requirements:

Please ensure nursing staff are aware of any dietary requirements due to swallowing difficulties, allergies or cultural requirements so that suitable food and fluids can be provided throughout your stay in hospital. If you have swallowing difficulties, you may be referred to a speech and language therapist who might suggest that you have texture modified food and fluids. This may mean that some of the supplement drinks might not be suitable.

Advice for Home

If your appetite does not return to normal at home, here are some practical tips to help improve nutritional intake:

- Encourage food to be eaten little and often (i.e. small portions at meals times with snacks offered in between e.g. a small sandwich, sausage rolls, jam tart, full-fat yoghurt, mixed nuts and raisins, biscuits, cakes, cheese).
- Offer full cream milk and full-fat foods instead of low-fat products.
- Fortify milk by adding 3– 4 tablespoons of dried milk powder to 1 pint full cream milk and use this to make drinks, soup, puddings and sauces.
- Add sugar to cereals, puddings and drinks (not suitable for people with diabetes).
- Try a nourishing drink such as Complan, Build-up, Meritene or a supermarket own brand of high protein drink or make your own fruit smoothie/milkshake.

If you remain concerned about weight loss or are worried about lack of appetite, contact your GP.

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Legal Notice

Please remember that this leaflet is intended as general information only. We aim to make the information as up to date and accurate as possible. Please therefore always check specific advice or any concerns you may have with your doctor.

For a translation of this leaflet or for accessing this information in another format:



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