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Oral Nutritional Supplements for Improved Outcomes

The way we eat is fundamental to everyday living. The benefits of maintaining a good nutritional foundation when diagnosed with cancer, and during cancer treatment pays off in improved energy and strength, better tolerance to treatment, and fewer complications.

Cancer itself can affect appetite, digestion, and the way the body uses nutrients. Cancer treatment may be spread over a long period of time and include surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation. Each one of these treatments may impose side effects or “roadblocks” that interfere with the ability to eat well too. Common side effects include sore mouth or throat, taste changes, poor appetite, and fatigue. Many people prefer to drink their calories if eating is a challenge. If you are losing weight and having difficulty eating enough each day, consider trying an oral nutritional supplement.

Several studies have shown that adding oral nutritional supplements to a nutrition plan can improve nutritional intake, help maintain body weight, and improve outcomes.

What is an Oral Nutritional Supplement and How Can it Help Me?



Oral nutritional supplements are fortified beverages that provide extra calories, protein and essential vitamins and minerals. Oral nutritional supplements are used to supplement food intake, and to maximize calorie and protein intake. One serving (8-fl-oz) of an oral nutritional supplement typically provides:

- 250-350 calories
- 9-13 grams of protein
- 24 or more essential vitamins and minerals

These beverages come in a variety of forms and flavors to meet your nutritional needs and taste preferences. Some of these products provide additional nutrients designed to promote healing and improve outcomes. Talk to your health care team about which product may be right for you.

How Can I Use Oral Nutritional Supplements?

The best way to use oral nutritional supplements is to determine what works best for you and your schedule. Oral nutritional supplements can be taken in addition to your usual meals, or as a snack between meals. If an eight ounce portion is too much at once, you can try using 1-2 ounces of a supplement to take your medications throughout the day.*

*Please ask your healthcare team if your medications can be taken with food.

Here are some ideas to help increase your nutrition if you are having trouble eating well during or after treatment:

- Try different varieties of oral nutritional supplements to find one that appeals to you.



- Experiment with different flavors, and rotate to avoid getting tired of the same flavor.



- If you do not enjoy “milk-like” supplements, try a protein fortified “juice-like” supplement instead.



- Try adding the supplement to your usual foods, such as adding it to your coffee or cereal.



- Make milkshakes or smoothies with the supplement; try adding fruit or nut butters.



- Try freezing the supplement to make it more similar to ice cream.



As you continue with your cancer treatment, your tastes may change; you may benefit from using a variety of supplemental food and beverage options to meet your nutritional needs. There are many resources available to help you obtain the supplements you need.

Ask your health care team for more information on the type of oral nutritional supplements available, what supplement will best meet your needs, and if there are any resources available to help you obtain the supplements, such as coupons or sales. Check with your cancer center staff for available coupons.

If you have a feeding tube, always work with your health care team, and especially with your dietitian, to determine which tube feeding formula is right for you.

Contact a Certified Specialist in Oncology Nutrition (CSO) or Oncology dietitian for more information: www.oncologynutrition.org

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