

## Nutrition in Cancer Care (PDQ®)



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### NCI Highlights

## Nutrition Therapy in Cancer Care

### Key Points for This Section

- [Screening and assessment are done before cancer treatment begins, and assessment continues during treatment.](#)
- [Finding and treating nutrition problems early may improve the patient's prognosis \(chance of recovery\).](#)
- [A healthcare team of nutrition specialists will continue to watch for nutrition problems.](#)
- [There are three main goals of nutrition therapy for cancer patients in active treatment and recovery.](#)
- [The goal of nutrition therapy for patients who have advanced cancer is to help with the patient's quality of life.](#)

Screening and assessment are done before cancer treatment begins, and assessment continues during treatment.

Screening is used to look for nutrition risks in a patient who has no symptoms. This can help find out if the patient is likely to become malnourished, so that steps can be taken to prevent it.

Assessment checks the nutritional health of the patient and helps to decide if nutrition therapy is needed to correct a problem.

Screening and assessment may include questions about the following:

- Weight changes over the past year.
- Changes in the amount and type of food eaten compared to what is usual for the patient.
- Problems that have affected eating, such as loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, constipation, mouth sores, dry mouth, changes in taste and smell, or pain.
- Ability to walk and do other activities of daily living (dressing, getting into or out of a bed or chair, taking a bath or shower, and using the toilet).

A physical exam is also done to check the body for general health and signs of disease. The doctor will look for loss of weight, fat, and muscle, and for fluid buildup in the body.

[Report to the Nation Shows U.S. Cancer Death Rates Continue to Drop](#)

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Finding and treating nutrition problems early may improve the patient's prognosis (chance of recovery).

Early nutrition screening and assessment help find problems that may affect how well the patient's body can deal with the effects of cancer treatment. Patients who are underweight or malnourished may not be able to get through treatment as well as a well-nourished patient. Finding and treating nutrition problems early can help the patient gain weight or prevent weight loss, decrease problems with the treatment, and help recovery.

A healthcare team of nutrition specialists will continue to watch for nutrition problems.

A nutrition support team will check the patient's nutritional health often during cancer treatment and recovery. The team may include the following specialists:

- Physician.
- Nurse.
- Registered dietitian.
- Social worker.
- Psychologist.

A patient whose religion doesn't allow eating certain foods may want to talk with a religious advisor about allowing those foods during cancer treatment and recovery.

There are three main goals of nutrition therapy for cancer patients in active treatment and recovery.

The main goals of nutrition therapy for patients in active treatment and recovery are to provide nutrients that are missing, maintain nutritional health, and prevent problems. The health care team will use nutrition therapy to do the following:

- Prevent or treat nutrition problems, including preventing muscle and bone loss.
- Decrease side effects of cancer treatment and problems that affect nutrition.
- Keep up the patient's strength and energy.
- Help the immune system fight infection.
- Help the body recover and heal.
- Keep up or improve the patient's quality of life.

Good nutrition continues to be important for patients who are in remission or whose cancer has been cured.

The goal of nutrition therapy for patients who have advanced cancer is to help with the patient's quality of life.

The goals of nutrition therapy for patients who have advanced cancer include the following:

- Control side effects.
- Lower the risk of infection.
- Keep up strength and energy.
- Improve or maintain quality of life.

See the [Nutrition in Advanced Cancer](#) section for more information.

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