



For The Private Hospital Sector

NUTRITION FACT SHEET

Tips To Manage Poor Appetite When Unwell

When we feel unwell, one of the most common challenges we face is a loss of appetite. Whether it's due to a cold, flu, or other health issues, a diminished appetite can make it harder for our bodies to heal and recover. However, there are several strategies you can employ to enhance your appetite and boost your nutritional intake during illness. In this factsheet, we explore some practical tips to maintain proper nutrition even when you are not feeling hungry.

KEY MESSAGES

1. Hospital Malnutrition Prevalence:
Hospital-acquired malnutrition affects up to 65% of inpatients.
2. Poor appetite is a prevalent issue among hospitalised individuals, potentially leading to malnutrition-related complications.
3. Addressing Poor Appetite:
Small and frequent meals, nutrient-dense choices, proper fluid timing, new flavours, nourishing drinks, and physical activity.

BACKGROUND

Research has revealed that hospital-acquired malnutrition affects up to 65% of inpatients. Poor appetite was found to be the most common prevalent challenge, affecting 25% to 55.5% of patients. Malnutrition is closely associated with delayed recovery from wounds and illnesses, increased risks of falls and fractures, increased susceptibility to infections, diminished quality of life, and extended hospital stay.

Therefore, addressing poor appetite is crucial for maintaining adequate nutrition and preventing malnutrition and its associated complications.

TIPS TO ENHANCE APPETITE AND BOOST NUTRITION INTAKE

1. Have small and frequent meals

Instead of having 3 large meals, try having 6 small meals across the day (e.g. 3 main meals plus 3 mid meals). Try to eat by the clock (e.g. every 2 hours), even if you are not feeling hungry.

2. Choose nutrient dense meals and snacks.

Choose mainly foods that are high in protein and energy, and "make every mouthful count". Some strategies to increase your protein and energy intake:

- Choose a protein source of breakfast (e.g. eggs, baked beans, peanut butter).
- Add milk, yoghurt or honey to your cereal.



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- For your main meals, prioritise the protein (meat, chicken, seafood, legumes) and carbohydrate (pasta, bread, rice, potatoes) components over vegetables, as the fibre content in vegetables can fill you up quickly.
- Add extra cheese or creamy sauces to your meals.
- Choose desserts that are high in protein and energy, e.g. cheese and crackers, yoghurt, muffins, custard or mousse.

3. Drink fluids between meals

Drinking fluids with meals can fill you up quickly, so try drinking fluids between meals instead.

4. Try new foods and flavours

Different colours, flavours, smells and textures may increase your interest in food.

5. Have nourishing drinks

When you don't feel like eating foods, a nourishing drink may be easier to have. Choose drinks that are high in energy and protein over water, tea and coffee.

For example::

- Milk
- Milkshakes
- Smoothies
- Nutritional supplements e.g. Sustagen or Ensure

6. Increase physical activity if possible

Physical activity can help stimulate appetite. If possible, take a short walk daily.

7. If you are experiencing pain or nausea, talk to your doctor.

Taking pain relief medication and anti-nausea medication as prescribed by your doctor can help you to feel and eat better.

In addition, ginger and peppermints can help reduce nausea.

8. Try colder or room temperature foods

Colder foods do not taste or smell as strong as hot foods and may be tolerated better. For example:

- Sandwiches
- Salads
- Snacks - biscuits, toast, crackers
- Desserts - jelly, custard, yoghurt or ice cream

