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Loss of Appetite (Anorexia) and Cachexia

Cancer and cancer treatment can increase how much energy your body needs. At the same time, you might lose your appetite (anorexia). This can lead to cachexia.

- Anorexia is the loss of appetite. If you lose your appetite, you are likely to eat less. This can cause you to lose weight and make you feel more tired and weak.
- Cachexia develops when people with cancer totally lose their appetite. This leads to both weight and muscle loss. Cachexia is most common in people with [advanced cancer](#)¹.

Both anorexia and cachexia can affect your quality of life and ability to do usual activities. They can also affect how well you can handle your cancer treatment.

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Anorexia

What causes loss of appetite (anorexia)?

People with cancer lose their appetite for many reasons.

Tumors that are in or around parts of the digestive tract might make it harder to eat. They might cause trouble swallowing or make you feel full after a small amount.

- Hormones released by some cancers so the body doesn't know that it's hungry.
- [Changes in taste or smell](#)²
- [Pain](#)³
- [Nausea or vomiting](#)⁴
- [Constipation](#)⁵ or [diarrhea](#)⁶

as metaclopramide, megestrol acetate, olanzapine, and dexamethasone
(steroid)Over-the-counter medicines for gas and other problems that may not need
a prescription _____

Let your cancer care team know if you have any of the following symptoms:

- Feel sick to your stomach and can't eat at all for a day or more
- Vomit for more than 24 hours
- Are unable to drink or keep down liquids
- Lose 3 pounds or more in a week (or less than a week)
- Don't urinate (pee) often, and when you do, it comes out in small amounts, smells strong, or is dark colored
- Don't urinate (pee) for an entire day
- Don't move your bowels (poop) for 2 days or more

Cancer cachexia

What causes cancer cachexia?

Cachexia develops when:

- The body needs more energy (calories) to handle changes caused by cancer or cancer treatments.
- The person with cancer loses their appetite and can't eat enough calories to meet the body's need.

The person with cancer cachexia loses muscle as well as fat and overall weight. This can lead to weakness and fatigue, and possibly not being able to do usual daily activities.

A person with cachexia may look very thin. If they were overweight before having cancer, they may just look like they've lost weight. Sometimes blood tests are needed to find out if someone has cachexia.

Cancer cachexia can cause low levels of some nutrients, such as protein and certain vitamins and minerals, and can be life-threatening. People with cancer who lose weight without trying should let their cancer care team know.

Treatment of cachexia

People with cachexia need to get more calories and protein to offset the loss of weight, muscle, and other nutrients. Steps to treat this may include:

- Working with a registered dietitian nutritionist (RDN) or registered dietitian (RD) to come up with a plan to stop losing weight. They will most often suggest a high-protein, high-calorie diet with nutrient-rich foods. This may include different supplements or ways of preparing food. They can also offer tips on how to deal with loss of appetite.
- There are some medicines that the cancer care team can prescribe that might help increase appetite or help with other symptoms that may lower appetite.

- Lose 3 pounds or more in a week (or less than a week)

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