

## **Nutrition During Cancer Treatment**

Cancer and its treatments may affect your child's appetite. It can also change how your child eats and how the body uses nutrients in food.

### **Why is good nutrition important?**

Getting the right nutrition will help your child:

- Fight and prevent infection.
- Grow and develop.
- Get better after surgery.
- Gain strength. This helps your child do the things they like to do.
- Better tolerate treatments and the side effects.

### **How will my child get nutrition during cancer treatment?**

Your child will get nutrition in one or more of these ways:

**Eating by mouth.** The most natural way to provide nutrition is by eating and drinking.

Diet changes will be made to improve nutrition. The healthcare team recommends:

- High calorie, high protein meals.
- High calorie drinks. This includes milkshakes, Carnation Breakfast or Pediasure.
- Small meals with frequent snacks.

Even with diet changes, your child may not be able to eat enough by mouth. Other ways to give nutrition may be used to keep your child from losing weight and muscle mass.

**Appetite Stimulants.** Medicine may be used to help increase appetite.

**Tube Feeding.** This may be used if your child needs more nutrition to meet calorie needs. Many children with a feeding tube can still eat by mouth.

- A thin and bendy tube is put in the nose and goes down into the stomach.
- A tube is used to give fluids. A high calorie drink is used. It provides all the calories, protein, vitamins and minerals your child needs.
- Medicines can also be given through the tube.
- Children often feel better once tube feedings are started and may start eating more.
- Early use of tube feedings may be better than waiting until weight loss occurs.

### **Parenteral Nutrition**

- Sometimes tube feeding cannot be used. In such cases special fluids that contain sugar, protein and fat may be given through an IV. This is called total parenteral nutrition (TPN).

## What types of nutrition does my child need?

All people need different building blocks to maintain health and weight. In patients getting cancer treatment these building blocks are very important because they help your child grow and develop. The main building blocks are:

### Protein

- Promotes growth
- Prevents muscle breakdown
- Repairs body tissue
- Boosts the immune system

**Carbohydrates and fats.** These provide energy.

**Vitamins/Minerals.** Children may not get enough vitamins and minerals if they are not eating well. Ask your doctor or dietitian whether a daily multivitamin is needed. Certain vitamins are not allowed.

**Fluids.** Children may become dehydrated if they are vomiting, have diarrhea or cannot drink enough fluids. Ask your healthcare team how much fluid your child needs to prevent dehydration.

**ALERT:** Call your child's doctor, nurse, or clinic if you have any concerns or if your child has special health care needs not covered by this information.

**This teaching sheet is meant to help you care for your child. It does not take the place of medical care. Talk with your healthcare provider for diagnosis, treatment, and follow-up.**