



YOUR RECIPE FOR RECOVERY



Bowel Cancer Australia

BOWEL CANCER

diet & nutrition

introduction

People recovering from bowel cancer can face many issues on their journey back to health. Some may still feel in shock, emotionally drained or physically very weak – but it's still vitally important for patients to try to look after themselves and build up their strength, both mentally and physically.

Food and diet can often cause problems for patients on their road to recovery. You may not be able to tolerate some of the foods you once enjoyed and your new bowel habits might be hard to come to terms with.

But there should be no reason for food to become 'the enemy' or for diet to start ruling your life. Food can still be fun and something to be enjoyed, with a little patience and planning.

We really hope that this booklet provides support and useful advice for you and above all highlights the fact that you are not alone. Many people experience difficulties with their diet and have had to take a new approach to food. But your well-being is the priority and together with your health professionals you'll be able to discover what works for you. Good luck!

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One step at a time...

For many patients, the day you leave hospital following treatment for bowel cancer (whether surgery, chemotherapy or radiotherapy) is just the start of your journey on the road to recovery.

Initial relief at having finished a sometimes difficult and tiring treatment plan may be replaced with a feeling of confusion and anxiety at the prospect of having to rediscover your relationship with food – and to come to terms with the fact that your bowels may never be the same again.

Foods that were once real favourites can suddenly turn into the enemy – able to spark off erratic bowel movements or an embarrassing rush to the nearest loo. Once enjoyable treats such as a dinner party with friends or a trip to a local restaurant can become something to be feared – what's the point of having to think about everything that passes your lips, worrying that one bite could consign you to the toilet for the next half an hour.

But, it really doesn't have to be like that...

At Bowel Cancer Australia, we are not just concerned with raising awareness of the condition and research – we are also here to support and advise patients as they start to regain a normal life and return to all the activities they once enjoyed before their diagnosis.

Food is an important part of all our lives – not only do we need a good diet to maintain our strength and health, it is also often associated with social and fun activities.

Through talking and listening to our patient supporters – and also the many people who regularly contact us for support and advice – we understand that there is a real need for specific nutritional guidance and practical tips for those who are slowly wanting to rediscover a normal appetite for food following cancer treatment.

We hope this booklet will help both patients and health professionals understand some simple ways of re-introducing a healthy, normal diet and eventually taking the 'fear factor' away from food.

Above all, we want all bowel cancer patients – at whatever stage of their treatment or recovery – to recognise that they are not alone, and the greatest source of advice and support you can get is often from people who have been through a similar experience.



treatment

Each individual reacts differently to radiotherapy and chemotherapy drugs – some people may only experience side effects briefly or temporarily, others may be more seriously affected and really struggle to know what's best to eat. Here are some common complaints and some suggested ways to combat them:

Sore mouth

- Drink plenty of nourishing fluids, such as fruit smoothies or milkshakes (if dairy intolerant try rice, oat or soy milk)
- Cold foods and drinks – such as ice cream, jellies and crushed ice
- Drink through a straw
- Avoid salty or spiced foods
- Avoid rough textured food such as toast
- Keep mouth clean, using mouthwash
- If gums are sore, use a 'soft' bristled toothbrush
- Avoid very hot food or drink

Diarrhoea

If this is caused by radiotherapy, changing your diet may not help you. You should ensure that you increase your fluid intake, and if symptoms persist, it is important to seek advice from a health professional (doctor, dietitian or nutritionist). They may suggest that you take anti-diarrhoeal medicine.

Dry mouth

- Take frequent sips of drinks
- Try sucking ice lollies or ice cubes
- Chewing gum and sucking sweets can stimulate saliva
- Add gravy and sauce to foods, enjoy soups, stews and well cooked casserole dishes
- Avoid sticky or dry foods such as pastry – they can stick to the top of your mouth and make swallowing difficult
- Try Biotene range gel, gum, liquid, mouth spray and toothpaste - to stimulate saliva - this can be purchased from a pharmacy

Constipation

Fibre or roughage is recommended as well as an increase in fluid intake, but do consult your doctor, dietitian or nutritionist for advice on dealing with constipation before making any changes.



overcoming side effects

Wind

- Eat and drink slowly in a relaxed environment, taking time to chew foods well
- Don't eat on the move
- Eat at regular intervals
- Avoid 'windy' foods such as beans, cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, pickles and fizzy drinks
- Try charcoal tablets or peppermint, fennel water, tea
- Take a probiotic capsule which can be purchased from a pharmacy
- Exercise on a regular basis
- Stop smoking
- Try anti-flatulents – talk to your pharmacist about over the counter products

Nausea/Vomiting

- Try eating dry food such as toast or crackers first thing in the morning
- Eat small, frequent meals
- Drink plenty of fluids
- Choosing cold food and drinks may help
- Avoid greasy, fatty or fried foods
- Ginger can help – try tea or biscuits, root ginger in syrup, ginger ale
- Sipping fizzy drinks, such as ginger ale, soda water or lemonade
- Avoid lying flat after meals, sit upright
- Try tart foods such as grapefruit, lemon, lime, pineapple juice, tinned fruit
- Try salty foods such as peanuts or salted crackers

Nutrition Notes: 'Back to Basics'

When undergoing treatment, it is important to keep your strength up, so the key advice is to eat the foods you enjoy and that you feel you can manage.



Keeping your diet simple may help to maintain your appetite – food that is easy to digest such as white fish/ chicken in sauce, mashed potato, yoghurt, soups, stews, custard and ice-cream should provide you with the energy you need, without causing too many problems in the short term.

If you are finding it difficult to eat a range of foods and are concerned about your nutrient intake, your doctor, dietitian or nutritionist can prescribe dietary supplements to aid your intake during treatment. And, if you enjoy cake or a doughnut occasionally – then go for it!

maintaining a healthy diet

Feeding your appetite...

Many patients will experience weight loss or lack of appetite at various stages of their treatment program. This is a normal reaction to some of the chemotherapy drugs used or an after effect of major surgery. It could also be caused by anxiety or a general feeling of nausea.

However, it is of course vital to try to maintain a healthy, well-balanced diet to aid recovery and experts recommend adopting a high energy and protein diet. This is recommended because the treatments you undergo (surgery, chemotherapy, radiotherapy) all 'cost' the body a lot of energy that needs replacing to help the healing process. Eating well also helps maintain appetite and a sense of well-being.

Snacking is a good and sometimes easier alternative than having to face full meals – milkshakes, soups and smoothies can also provide a nourishing option for people who find chewing and swallowing difficult.

A good diet is well balanced, 'nutrient-rich' and offers a variety of taste – ideally it should include foods from each of the following groups:



maintaining a healthy diet

Carbohydrates

Breads, rice, pasta, potatoes, breakfast cereals and biscuits are all carbohydrate sources, which provide energy, fibre, vitamins and minerals.

Vitamins, minerals and fibre

Fruit and vegetables (whether fresh or frozen) are a good source of vitamins. However, if you are unable to tolerate this as a regular part of your diet, or if you are unable to eat for long periods of time, you may need to consult your GP about a vitamin supplement.

Protein

Meat, poultry, fish, eggs, milk and cheese are all rich in protein and provide vitamins and minerals. Beans, nuts and lentils are also good sources of protein but can sometimes cause problems such as wind.

Fats

Oil, butter, oily fish, eggs, cheese, nuts, seeds, mayonnaise, cream, full fat milk and yoghurts are fat sources, some also provide protein, vitamins and energy.

Fluids

It is important to drink around 8 glasses (2 litres) of fluid a day to keep the body functioning properly, including tea, water and juices.

There are a number of tasty tricks for patients who want to 'bulk up' either pre or post surgery.

Opting for full fat milk, (or milk alternative) rather than skimmed, is a simple way of adding calories to your diet – and is even more effective if you add it to milk powders (such as Milo) or protein drinks (such as Sustagen Hospital Grade) which can be purchased at a pharmacy.

Evaporated milk, cream and coconut cream are delicious – and usually naughty – ways of keeping your weight stable during treatment. So, enjoy!

And, just keep thinking of interesting and tasty ways of adding some extra calories to your normal diet e.g. grating cheese, milk and cream into mashed potato, pasta with creamy sauce, greek yoghurt and ice-cream with fruit crumbles, desserts, add full fat sour cream or yoghurt on top of a steaming potato. Yum!

Nutrition Notes: 'Alcohol - Friend or Foe?'

Many of us enjoy a glass of wine over dinner or a beer on a hot day. But should alcohol be off the menu once you've had bowel cancer and you are trying to develop a healthy and normal diet?

Experts recommend that a moderate intake of alcohol is quite safe for people recovering from bowel cancer. In fact, drinks such as Guinness or a

dark ale can help people who are trying to put on weight following treatment and a lemon lime and angostura bitters can boost a patient's appetite.

However, it is important to remember that 'gassy' drinks such as cider and beer can cause wind – and alcohol should be avoided completely if you are prone to diarrhoea and dehydration.

stoma advice

Living with a colostomy

In general, people with a colostomy can eat whatever they like – and as such, there is no real dietary advice or ‘do’s and don’ts’ for those patients who are trying to get used to the new way that their bowel now works (whether on a temporary or permanent basis).

In fact, food is just one of the things that may affect stoma output – other things that may have an effect include physical and emotional feelings, medication and other treatments.

However, all patients will quickly realise that the level of stoma output will be affected by the amount you eat and when you eat, so, as a general rule, it’s often a good idea not to eat too late at night.

Finding out which foods may affect you can be ‘hit and miss’ and a process of elimination. Patients will not always experience the same problems and therefore foods that affect one person may not upset another.

Remember, everyone is different – but the following may provide some guidance:

Foods that may loosen stools

Raw vegetables, Spices, Prunes, Chocolate, Fresh fruit, Salad dressing and Coffee.

Foods that can cause odours

Green vegetables (esp. asparagus), Fish, Eggs, Onions, Beans and Cheese.

Foods that may cause wind

Nuts/seeds, Fruit, Cucumber, Sprouts, Beans and pulses, Chocolate, Onions, Curries, Sweetcorn and Beer.

Foods that can control odours

Tomato juice, Orange juice, Natural yoghurt and Parsley.

Foods that may thicken output

Bananas (very ripe), Boiled rice, Marshmallows/jelly babies, Porridge, Smooth peanut butter, Instant mash potato, White bread, Pasta and Gelatine.

Foods that may cause obstruction and may need to be avoided initially

Nuts, Sweetcorn, Pulses and beans, Popcorn, Dried fruit, Mushrooms and Stringy fruit and vegetables.

If you have an ileostomy, you will lose salt and fluid into your bag which must be replaced by increasing your fluid intake and adding salt to your diet.

Salt can be safely added in a number of ways, including packet/tinned soup, vegemite or soy sauce, hard cheese and potato chips.



After stoma reversal

This is a stage of the bowel cancer journey that often causes the most problems for patients, as they struggle to return to a normal diet. People feel relieved because a stoma reversal often means the end of a long period of treatment and having to live with a colostomy bag – but also brings with it the realisation that your bowel (and therefore daily motions) may never return to the way it was before. Simple advice is not to expect too much, too soon. For many patients, it may take up to two years to develop and recognise a 'new routine'.



Nutrition Notes: 'Take the 'roughage with the smoothies!'

We're all told about the health benefits of eating 2 serves of fruit and 5 serves of vegetables a day, but for many people, fruit and vegetables can really cause problems.

However, it's still important to try to get the nutritional goodness from these foods – so why not

try a smoothie? 'Trendy and tasty' smoothies are quick and easy to make and can be packed with nutrients.

Other tips to remember (for the period of time immediately after the stoma reversal): always peel fruit; try to avoid fruit with lots of pips and seeds, such as tomatoes, raspberries and strawberries; eat ripe bananas.

food for thought

For many patients, the emotional issues are as hard to come to terms with as the physical problems. Cancer, major surgery and a change to bowel habits can have a huge impact on personal relationships and other factors such as self-confidence and performance at work.

The important thing to remember is that it's your journey and you must try not to compare yourself to others. In time you will learn to recognise and embrace your new routine and realise that friends, family and work colleagues are far more understanding and accepting than you might imagine.

At work:

Don't be afraid or embarrassed about having to update colleagues and bosses on your condition and the fact that you may sometimes have to excuse yourself from meetings or presentations. No-one will mind, or even notice, after a while! Don't fall into the trap of 'starving yourself' to help get through situations – it's not healthy or useful for anyone to cut down their calories so dramatically, and can lead to an erratic and abnormal relationship with food. If you find that you are having to go without food for long periods of time because of difficulties managing your bowel routine, then you should make an appointment with your GP for further investigation and advice.

At play:

Your family and friends will have supported you from the day you were diagnosed and will continue to do so as you make progress in your voyage of recovery. Therefore no-one will be offended if you call prior to a dinner party to ask 'what's on the menu' or if you could be seated nearest to the loo.

The secret is often 'risk assessment'. If you're going for a 'night out with the boys/girls', check if you're planning on having a burger, chips and beer at 11pm. There's no reason why you can't – but you might need to check the whereabouts of the loos, avoid public transport on the way home and try not to arrange important meetings or functions the next day.

Theatre trips and retail therapy are also activities that should be enjoyed and not ruined by a 'fear of food'. Again, the same advice applies – don't starve yourself but do try to avoid very large portions of food if you know access to a public loo might be restricted for a while and don't be afraid to ask to be seated near a toilet.

You may like to download the **National Public Toilet Map** onto your computer or mobile phone.

The map shows the location of public and private public toilet facilities across Australia.

Details of toilet facilities can also be found along major travel routes and for shorter journeys as well. Useful information is provided about each toilet, such as location, opening hours, availability of baby change rooms, accessibility for people with disabilities and the details of other nearby toilets.

Visit www.toiletmap.gov.au or call 1800 990 646 for more information.

practical issues: be prepared!

Holidays and travel can become a big area of concern for many recovering bowel cancer patients – and some people find that the easiest answer is simply to avoid potentially difficult situations altogether. Just because you have had bowel cancer, there is no reason why you should never go on a holiday or eat out at a restaurant again.

Here are some useful tips that will help you to return to a normal and practical routine – that is not ‘ruled’ by your dietary needs or bowel movements:

- Stick to what you know: it’s probably advisable not to try new and exotic foods (e.g. very spicy foods) whilst away on holiday, especially in foreign countries.
- Don’t be afraid to ask for special dietary requirements: most restaurants are now very used to tailoring menus for people with special requirements (e.g. wheat intolerances, allergies) so many chefs will be more than happy to adapt a meal that is more suitable for you.
- Know your routine: as time goes by, you will start to recognise your new habits so, where possible, try to plan your travel and meals around the times you think you may need to empty your bowels. Try not to be obsessed about timings but being a little bit forewarned can really help to alleviate anxiety.
- Take medication: appropriate, prescribed treatments (such as Imodium) can really give you the freedom to embark on long flights or car/train journeys.
- Always make it your business to find out where the loos are.
- Finally, be sensible: this advice applies to all travellers visiting foreign countries but is especially relevant to people with sensitive, unpredictable bowels or who may be in danger of becoming dehydrated through diarrhoea or if using a colostomy bag. Obvious travel tips include always drinking bottled water, be wary of salads and uncooked meats, go to reputable/busy restaurants, avoid shellfish and ice.



Nutrition Notes

If your bowel habits are really starting to have an adverse effect on your everyday life, then it is important for you to see your GP. They will be able to prescribe appropriate medication (e.g. Imodium,

Codeine phosphate) which, if necessary, can be taken on a daily basis.

In some cases, a referral to a nutritionist or dietitian for more personal and in-depth advice may be useful.

experiment and eliminate

There are no set rules about foods you can and can't eat. It's often a matter of experimenting for yourself. Remember, everyone's different and the road to recovery can be a long and, at times, difficult journey. We've asked some bowel cancer patients to tell us their own personal top tips, and can share some of these below.

Remember though, it's still often a case of trial and error and what works for one person, might not work for you...

"I found flavoured water very palatable and really helped me to keep my fluid intake up following surgery and during the early days of adjusting to a stoma."

"Taking Fybrogel (a type of soluble fibre, available on prescription or at selected pharmacies over the counter) with meals has really helped me to control my problems with diarrhoea."

"Inner Health Plus (which contains pro-biotics and can be bought in health food shops or pharmacies) really helped with frequent episodes of diarrhoea."

"My husband couldn't bear the taste of red wine following chemotherapy – so he switched to white wine, finding it much more palatable and a nice treat."

"I really steer clear of anything that's high in fibre, such as wholemeal bread."

"Nutritional 'sprinkles' (such as Sustagen Hospital Grade which can be purchased at the pharmacy) were a really easy way of adding extra calories to my diet when I was losing both my appetite and weight. I'd also recommend a dark ale or Guinness – full of iron and calories!"

"Energy drinks (such as Lucozade and isotonic sports drinks such as Gatorade, available in supermarkets and pharmacies) really helped me when I'd lost my appetite and felt weak through weight loss. It also helped to keep my salt intake up."

"I always feel ravenous when I come out of surgery, so I keep a supply of my favourite chocolate bar (Chunky Kit Kat) in my hospital bedside locker!"

"That horrible, metallic taste in your mouth, caused by chemo, can really stop you from enjoying so many of your favourite things. I found drinking wine from a plastic cup, rather than glass, really helped!"

"I found apple juice helped to relieve my constipation. It was also tasty and felt like a healthy option!"

"Ginger beer really helped with nausea when undergoing chemotherapy."



experiment and eliminate



Top Five Tips :

- Eat regularly, try small frequent meals if this suits you best
- Ensure you keep well-hydrated
- Don't worry if fruit and veg proves hard to stomach at first; introduce them gradually
- Avoid foods high in fibre in the early days, although you should be able to tolerate them in time
- Don't be afraid to ask for advice if your bowel habits continue to be erratic

further support and useful contacts

About Bowel Cancer Australia

Bowel Cancer Australia is a national charity, dedicated to raising awareness of the disease and to providing support and information for those affected by bowel cancer. Being diagnosed with bowel cancer will come as a terrible shock to most people. Whilst you will receive all your medical help and support from your healthcare professionals, you may also like to contact the charity to talk to other patients in a similar situation, speak to a nurse or nutritionist adviser, or receive further information about any aspect of your disease.

Patients, and their families, contact us at every stage of their bowel cancer journey, but many find us of particular help and comfort when they are having a break from treatment, or have finished treatment, and are no longer having that day-to-day support from the hospital.

'Love My Family' Community

The charity runs a national patient-to-patient network for people with bowel cancer, or relatives of bowel cancer patients. We can put people in touch with each other, by phone or email, matching them by age, geographical region, bowel cancer stage, or treatment received. Talking to someone else who has been through a similar experience can be hugely reassuring, and many patients who initially contact the Community for support go onto become members, providing support to others.

Nurse & Nutritionist Advisory Services

You will have a number of contacts at your local hospital who can answer specific questions about your treatment, and you should not be afraid to ask for help if you are worried at any stage of your bowel cancer journey. The charity also provides a Nurse and Nutritionist Advisory Service, which you may wish to call if you can't get hold of your assigned nurse, or if you have any other questions or worries.

Information Resources

The charity publishes a range of patient information, all available to order free of charge from the charity.

Please call **1800 555 494** or visit www.bowelcanceraustralia.org for further information.



Bowel Cancer Australia

Love.

BOWEL CANCER AUSTRALIA

I would like to support the work of Bowel Cancer Australia.

Your donation will not only help us to save lives, but also improve the health and wellbeing of those living with bowel cancer.

Please accept my donation of \$ _____ (donations over \$2 are tax-deductible).

My cheque / money order is enclosed (payable to Bowel Cancer Australia).

Or please debit my: MasterCard Visa Amex Diners

Card number: _____ / _____ / _____ / _____

Name on card: _____ Expiry date: ____ / ____

Signature: _____

Please note, if you prefer to donate by phone or online,
please call **1800 555 494**
or visit **www.bowelcanceraustralia.org**

My contact details

Title: _____ First Name: _____ Surname: _____

Postal Address: _____

Suburb: _____

State: _____ Postcode: _____ Phone: _____

Email: _____

Preferred method of contact: Post Email

Thank you on behalf of Bowel Cancer Australia.

Privacy statement: Your name will be placed on our mailing list and, from time to time, we will send you information about Bowel Cancer Australia. If you do not wish to receive such information, please tick this box . Please call 1800 555 494 should you require any further information.

Bowel Cancer Australia is a national charity working to reduce the impact of bowel cancer in our society through awareness, education, support and research. We aim to help save lives from this common cancer, Australia's second biggest cancer killer.

Charity initiatives such as Bowel Cancer Awareness Week®, BowelScreen Australia®, and the Healthy Community Program raise awareness among health professionals and the community about the importance of early detection and intervention in the successful treatment of bowel cancer.

Through our 'Love My Family' Community, we provide support, resources and advocacy for bowel cancer patients, their carers, close relatives and friends.

To do all this we rely on public support. If you would like to get involved, or make a donation, please visit our website.

www.bowelcanceraustralia.org



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