Loss of Appetite

Good nutrition is an important part of your cancer treatment. Anorexia is a decrease or complete loss of appetite, which may be a side effect of your disease or treatment. Eating less can lead to weight loss, which may affect your energy level and your ability to tolerate treatment.

What causes loss of appetite?

- Taste and smell changes
- Feelings of fullness
- Slower digestion of food
- Nausea and vomiting
- Diarrhea or constipation
- Fever
- Certain medications
- Depression
- Pain

What are some suggestions to help manage loss of appetite?

- Eat 6-8 times a day. Try to include high calorie, high protein foods and fluids.
- Limit fried or greasy foods. They are difficult to digest and make you feel full.
- Keep snacks available. Some snack suggestions include peanut butter and crackers, cheese and crackers, high protein smoothies, granola bars, and nuts. Liquid nutrition supplements can also be consumed between meals.
- Take advantage of the times when you are hungriest. Plan to eat your largest meal at this time.
- Make your meals enjoyable. Include your favorite foods and eat in a pleasant, relaxed atmosphere with good company.
- Light exercise, such as walking, before a meal may help improve your appetite.

You can discuss your side effects with a nurse or dietitian. They will give you additional suggestions based on your specific problems. You can also ask your doctor if there are medications which may help improve your appetite.

© 2002, 2009 The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center, Revised 09/30/09