

# Small Appetite?

A guide to eating well if  
you have a small  
appetite or are trying to  
gain weight

**Nutrition and Dietetics**  
Patient Information Leaflet

If you have a poor appetite, have problems with eating or have lost weight recently, it is important to eat regular high calorie meals and snacks as well as nourishing drinks.

This will help you to either gain weight or prevent further weight loss, to recover from illness or surgery, heal more quickly and reduce the risk of infection.

## General tips

- Small and often: if you have a small appetite, aim to have three small meals plus two to three nourishing drinks or snacks in between (aim to eat every two to three hours).
- Avoid low-fat or reduced-sugar foods or drinks. For example, use full-fat (whole) milk instead of skimmed or semi-skimmed milk, and normal butter/margarine/olive oil or sunflower spread rather than low-fat spread.
- Have drinks after meals, rather than before or with meals.
- Try to eat in a relaxed and comfortable environment.
- Aim to drink at least 1200-1500ml (six to eight cups) of fluid daily, ideally 568ml (one pint) of which is full-fat (whole) milk or fortified milk.
- If you have a dry mouth or ill-fitting dentures, soft moist foods will make it easier to eat. Add gravies and sauces to help soften foods.
- If your fruit and vegetable intake is poor, try a glass of orange juice or fruit smoothie to increase your vitamin C and boost your immune system.

## How can I add calories to drinks and food?

- You can make fortified milk by adding four heaped tablespoons (about 50g) of dried skimmed milk powder to one pint of full-fat milk. This can be used, for example, in drinks, on cereal, in custard and rice pudding, and in cheese sauce.
- Spread butter/margarine thickly on bread or crackers, and use liberally as follows:
  - Melt onto vegetables, boiled potatoes or jacket potatoes.
  - Stir into hot pasta or rice.
  - Stir into baked beans or scrambled eggs.
- Add grated cheese to soups, omelettes, scrambled eggs, baked beans or tinned spaghetti.
- Add cream, ice cream or custard to puddings or fruit (fresh, tinned or stewed).
- Use full fat mayonnaise or cream cheese in addition to usual sandwich fillings.
- Fry foods in oil rather than grill or bake.
- Add double cream or full fat yoghurt to curries and stews and use butter, vegetable oil or ghee generously in cooking.
- Use oil-based dressings on salads.

## Breakfast ideas

- Bowl of cereal or porridge with milk/fortified milk/cream and sugar.
- Toast, crumpets or muffins with thickly spread butter or margarine, plus jam, marmalade, peanut butter or egg (scrambled or fried).
- Hot buttered teacakes, hot cross buns or croissants.
- Bacon, sausage and/or egg sandwich.
- Pancakes or waffles with maple syrup or jam.

## Meal ideas

- Sandwiches with meat, corned beef, chicken, tuna, egg or cheese, with pickles, relish or mayonnaise.
- 'Cream of', lentil or bean soups served with bread and butter, or try adding cheese or cream.
- Omelette with extra cheese or ham, with tomatoes, baked beans or bread and butter.
- Buttered toast with cheese, baked beans, egg, pilchards, sardines, bacon or sausage.
- Ravioli or spaghetti on toast - try adding extra butter or grated cheese.
- Macaroni cheese or cauliflower cheese – try adding extra grated cheese and butter.
- Jacket potato with butter and cheese and beans, cheese or tuna mayonnaise.
- Corned beef hash, cheese and potato pie, quiche, cottage pie, lasagne or fish pie.
- Meat, chicken, fish or vegetarian alternative with cheese or creamy sauce, mashed potatoes with butter/margarine or cream, roast potatoes or chips and vegetables (with butter melted on top).
- Spiced meat/fish/dal (with cream/ghee/oil added), served with rice or chapatti/roti with added butter/margarine/oil or paratha.
- Traditional African/Caribbean soup with peanut butter.
- Traditional African/Caribbean stew served with fried yam, plantain or fried dumplings.

## pudding ideas

- Trifle.
- Full fat yoghurt, especially greek-style which is higher in protein.
- Rice or other milk-based pudding.
- Custard.
- Milk jelly.
- Chocolate mousse.
- Fromage frais.
- Egg custard.
- Sponge pudding/fruit crumble with custard or cream.
- High calorie ice cream or kulfi.
- Asian cakes and sweets e.g. balushahi and rasgulla.
- Bulla or grata cake.

## Nourishing snacks and drinks

- Milky drinks such as coffee, chai tea, malted drinks or hot chocolate.
- Milkshake – try adding ice cream to ready-made milkshakes, lassis, or follow the recipe on the next page.
- Small bowl of breakfast cereals with full-fat or fortified milk.
- Small piece of cheese with buttered crackers or slices of apple.
- Nuts (plain, salted, roasted, coated in chocolate or with dried fruit), bombay mix (chevda).
- Mini pork pies, sausage rolls, scotch eggs, spring rolls, pakora, onion bhajis or samosas.
- Peanut butter on toast.
- Small slice of fruit cake or fruit malt loaf/bun with butter; serve with small piece of cheese.
- Small square of flapjack.
- Small bag of chocolate buttons.
- Small mince or fruit pie.

## Homemade high-calorie fortified milkshake recipe:

Ingredients	Makes two milkshakes
Double cream	60ml (four tablespoons)
Whole milk	180ml (six tablespoons)
Vanilla ice cream	Two small scoops
Skimmed milk powder	48g (six level Tablespoons)
Estimated calories per milkshake	350 kcal
Estimated protein per milkshake	14g

Whisk/blend all of the ingredients together and store in the fridge for a maximum of 24 hours.

Milkshakes may be flavoured with blended fresh fruit (banana/strawberries), flavouring (e.g. Nesquik, Ovaltine), Nutella or blended chocolate biscuits (e.g. bourbons, Oreos – two **per portion**).

Smooth peanut butter can also be blended into the milkshake, which will further increase the protein (and calorie) content.

## Nutritional supplement drinks

Another way of increasing your nutritional intake is to try nourishing drinks, such as Meritene®, Complan® and Nurishment, which can be purchased from pharmacies and larger supermarkets.

## People with Diabetes

If you are underweight or have a very poor appetite, improving your nutrition is always a priority.

However, people with Diabetes are often encouraged to avoid sugary foods or drinks, so what should you do?

In the first instance, it is sensible to eat more calories by adding more fat into your diet, as this does not affect your blood glucose (blood sugar) levels (see page 4 '**How can I add calories to drinks and snacks?**').

If you are very underweight or have a very poor appetite, the main priority is to resolve this, so you can include more foods and drinks containing sugar. Eating and drinking these 'small and often' will minimise the effects on your blood glucose levels.

If your blood glucose levels do increase as a result of doing this, you may need to have your diabetes medication reviewed, or you may need to start on some.

If you need extra support with this, please see page 10.

## Calcium – food facts $\Delta$

Osteoporosis is a progressive bone disease characterised by low bone mass, and it contributes to at least 85 per cent of all fractures. Calcium is important at all ages for strong bones and teeth. In older people, adequate dietary intake of calcium and vitamin D is required in order to help maintain bone health.

### Where is calcium found in the diet?

The main sources of calcium in our diet are from milk and dairy produce. These sources can provide more than half of our daily requirements for calcium.

### How much calcium do I need each day?

In the UK, if you have been diagnosed with osteoporosis, it is recommended that you aim for 1000mg of calcium a day from dietary sources (from what you eat and drink).

### What does that mean?

To achieve 1000mg of calcium a day, aim for **17 calcium stars** from the following tables:

Horlicks Original (25g) with 200ml milk	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Ovaltine Original (25g) with 200ml milk	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Ovaltine Light Chocolate (25g) with milk	★ ★ ★
Milk (all types) one third of a pint (200ml)	★ ★ ★ ★
Fortified milk (see page 4) one third of a pint (200ml)	★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★
Cheese (hard) matchbox size (30g)	★ ★ ★ ★
Yoghurt (plain / fruit) 150g pot	★ ★ ★
Rice pudding, half a large tin (200g)	★ ★ ★
Custard, one serving (120ml)	★ ★



Milk chocolate (50g)	★
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### What if I do not eat dairy produce?

Although dairy produce is an excellent source of calcium, it does not suit everyone. Alternative sources of calcium can be found in the following products:

Calcium-fortified orange juice (250ml)	★★★
Sardines (with bones) half a tin (60g)	★★★★
Calcium-fortified milk alternative (e.g. soy, oat, nut 'milks') one third of a pint (200ml)	★★★★
Calcium-fortified cereal (30g)	★★
Calcium-fortified soy yoghurt, dessert, custard (125g pot)	★★
White bread, two large slices	★
Orange, one whole	★
Broccoli, two spears (85g)	★

**1 star = 60mg calcium ★**

▲ This information has been adapted from the BDA Calcium Food Fact Sheet.

### What about vitamin D?

To make sure that the calcium in our food is absorbed for use in our bones, we need to make sure that we get enough vitamin D. Vitamin D is also important for healthy muscles and teeth. You may benefit from a vitamin D supplement if you are not eating well, as it is difficult to obtain enough from the diet even when you are eating well.

Other factors which can mean you are more likely to need a vitamin D supplement are:

- If you are over the age of 65 years, as your body is not able to make as much vitamin D.

- If you do not go outside much or if you cover most of your skin.
- If you have darker skin (for example if you are of African, African-Caribbean or South Asian origin) as this means your body is not able to make as much vitamin D.

National and local guidelines suggest that in these cases you should consider taking a supplement containing 10 micrograms (or 400 IU's) of vitamin D daily, all year round.

If you are over 65 years of age and are housebound or living in a care facility and do not go outside often, then speak to your GP as you may be able to get this on prescription.

### Still concerned?

If you are still concerned about your appetite or weight, please contact the healthcare professional who gave you this sheet or your GP.

If you have diabetes and are concerned about your blood glucose levels, it may be necessary for your GP or nurse to review your medication and/or refer you a dietitian if you are not already seeing one. **It is important not to restrict your diet too much if you are not eating well.** Take this diet sheet along to show your GP/nurse.

**Please use this space for any notes you may wish to make:**

If you have any questions, or if there is anything you do not understand about this leaflet, please contact:

Dietitian Department at Russells Hall Hospital on **01384 244017**

Community Dietitian Department at Stourbridge Health and Social Care Centre on **01384 323749**

Russells Hall Hospital switchboard number: 01384 456111

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