



**The Dudley Group**  
NHS Foundation Trust

# Tips for a small appetite in hospital

**Nutrition and Dietetics  
Department**

**Patient Information Leaflet**

## Introduction

This leaflet is for people who have a small appetite while they are in hospital. It contains tips about what to eat to increase your intake of protein and calories both while you are in hospital and when you go home.

## Tips for when you are in hospital

- Choose fish, meat and cheese-based meals to increase your protein and calorie intake.
- Opt for hot puddings where possible as these usually contain more calories.
- If you prefer cheese with biscuits or yoghurt, ask the nurse if they are available. If they do not have any on the wards, the nurse can phone the help desk to request some.
- If you have special dietary requirements such as milk free, egg free, gluten free, halal or vegan, please ask your nurse as there is a selection of meals available to order on a special diet form.
- You can ask for full fat milk to drink, biscuits and fruit. These are always available for patients from the tea trolley.
- Wards may be able to offer Complan® milkshakes and Meritene® soups. These can be given without prescription so please ask your nurse.
- You can bring in snacks for between meals that can be kept by the side of your bed. These may include fruit, biscuits, chocolate, crisps, pots of jelly, custard or rice pudding.
- It may be useful if your relatives or friends bring in your preferred foods. Please check with nursing staff before doing this and see the section 'Bringing in food from home' for more information.
- If you are well enough, relatives or friends could take you to the hospital restaurant or cafe for a meal.

## Bringing in food from home:

Please **do not** bring in any of the foods listed below:

- Raw meat, poultry, raw fish, seafood or pâté
- Raw eggs
- Unpasteurised milk or soft cheeses
- Rice

The reason these foods are not permitted is that they can all carry food poisoning bacteria, which can put patients at risk.

Make sure that any high protein foods such as cooked meat or meat products, cooked fish or fish products, milk or dairy products, cooked eggs or egg products, or sandwiches, are kept cool whilst you are transporting them to hospital.

If you bring in cold foods, please ensure that they are given to the nursing staff for storage in the ward refrigerator. The foods will be labelled with your name and the date, and will be retained for your consumption for **24 hours. After 24 hours, foods will be thrown away.**

Please note: nursing staff are instructed not to accept food that has an expired use by or best before date.

We discourage the supply of hot foods to patients by their relatives due to the difficulties of keeping food hot during the journey into hospital. We do not have facilities on the wards to re-heat foods. However, soup may be brought in a flask.

## What if I need help with eating?

All wards have supported meal times to enable a suitable environment for eating. Friends and family can come and support at mealtimes if this will help you to eat better.

If you need help with eating and family and friends cannot help you with this, please speak to a nurse.

## Nutritional supplement drinks and puddings in hospital

While you are in hospital, the dietitian may suggest that you start having supplement drinks. These are used to supplement a healthy diet while you are unable to eat enough to meet your body's needs. Here are some tips for using these:

- Once a supplement drink has been opened, it can be left in the fridge but must be thrown away after 24 hours. If an open supplement has been left out of the fridge, it should be thrown away after four hours.
- Most supplements are best served chilled.

- Take supplements between meals so they do not interfere with your appetite at mealtimes.
- Milk-based supplements can be diluted further with milk as long as you take the full prescribed amount by the end of the day.
- Juice-based supplements can be diluted with water, lemonade, soda water or other fizzy drinks. However, you must take the full prescribed amount by the end of the day.
- You can add chopped banana to Forticreme, which is a pudding-style supplement.
- Original and unflavoured supplements can be mixed with milk and used in drinks, soups and breakfast cereals.

If you need any help with this, please speak to your nurse.

## Advice for home

If your appetite does not return to normal or you are struggling to gain weight, here are some practical tips to improve your nutritional intake at home:

- Try to eat little and often – have small meals, with snacks or milky drinks in between. Aim for three small meals and two to three snacks or milky drinks a day.
- Homemade milkshakes using milkshake flavouring such as Nesquik or Crusha, hot chocolate or malted drinks, such as Horlicks or Ovaltine, are great choices. You can make these using fortified milk (see next point about how to make fortified milk).
- Fortify milk by adding two to four tablespoons of dried milk powder (Marvel or supermarket own) to one pint of full fat milk. Add this to drinks, soups, sauces and puddings.
- Choose full fat milk and full fat products instead of low fat products.
- Add cream, sugar, jam or honey to breakfast cereals and milk puddings.
- Eat honey, marmalade, lemon curd, chocolate spread or peanut butter, for example on bread, toast, crispbreads, crackers or in puddings.
- Add grated cheese to soups, casseroles, vegetables and mashed potatoes.

- Add butter or margarine to vegetables, pasta and scrambled egg or add extra oil or ghee when cooking. You could also add cream when serving.
- Spread extra mayonnaise, butter or butter-like spreads on sandwiches.
- Try a nourishing drink such as Meritene®, Complan®, Nurishment or Nutrament. These are available without prescription from pharmacies and larger supermarkets.

### **Please note:**

If a few weeks have passed since you left hospital and your appetite has not improved, please ensure you have tried **all** the tips in this leaflet to prevent weight loss. If you are losing weight even after following all these tips, contact your GP.

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

Dietitians on 01384 244017 (8.30am to 4.30pm, Monday to Friday)

Russells Hall Hospital switchboard number: 01384 456111

**This leaflet can be downloaded or printed from:**

<http://dgft.nhs.uk/services-and-wards/nutrition/>

If you have any feedback on this patient information leaflet, please email [dgft.patient.information@nhs.net](mailto:dgft.patient.information@nhs.net)

**This leaflet can be made available in large print, audio version and in other languages, please call 0800 073 0510.**

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