Reviving Appetite

When cancer treatments zap your desire for food, certain meals and methods can help restore it.

September 13, 2021 By Kate Ferguson

Loss of appetite is a common side effect of cancer treatments. In addition, chemo and other therapies may cause altered taste, nausea and mouth sores, making it hard to eat. But these challenges can be overcome.

Speak to your medical team. A dietary expert can help you schedule regular times to eat, select the best types of food and preparation methods for meals, and suggest supplements to take.

Opt for healthy nutrient-dense foods. A great place to start is with your favorite comfort foods. Love mac and cheese? Make a healthy vegetarian version of this luscious, creamy dish with whole wheat pasta and cancer-fighting cruciferous veggies. (See Cook for Your Life's Vegetable Mac & Cheese recipe, below.)

Eat small meals more often. During the day, snack on quality high-protein, high-calorie foods, such as hard-boiled eggs, avocado slices, puddings, cheese, yogurt and tuna or chicken salads made with mayo. Indulge in smoothies made with milk—use protein-rich nut butters or nut milk if you can't do dairy—and your favorite fresh, ripe fruits, washed and thoroughly scrubbed.

Consume food in other forms. Puree veggies and create a tasty soup, or whip them and add butter. You can also use one of a number of appliances to transform fruits into frozen confections, such as popsicles or ice cream.

Drink enough liquids. It's important to stay hydrated. Sip water between meals throughout the day, and reach for fruit juices and drinks to quench your thirst.

Vegetable Mac & Cheese

½	pound whole wheat pasta
4	tablespoons butter
¼	cup all-purpose flour
2	cups warm milk
½	teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg

2 teaspoons grated Parmesan cheese

½ tablespoon olive oil

½ small cauliflower, chopped

1½ cups spinach

½ cup mozzarella cheese, shredded

salt and pepper to taste

1. Cook pasta until barely al dente (so it still has a bite).
2. While the pasta cooks, make the béchamel sauce. Melt the butter in a saucepan. Whisk in the flour and cook for 1 to 2 minutes until the mixture (known as a roux) turns a very light golden brown. Whisk in the milk a little at a time until the sauce is smooth. (Now the mixture is known as béchamel sauce.) Reduce the heat and allow to simmer gently, stirring regularly, until the sauce is thick. Add the nutmeg and cheese. Season with salt and pepper to taste and set the saucepan aside.
3. Heat olive oil in a sauté pan over a medium-high flame. Add the chopped cauliflower and sauté until the cauliflower is soft, about 10 minutes. Add the spinach to the cauliflower and cook until the spinach is wilted, about 2 to 3 minutes. Season with salt and pepper.
4. In a large bowl, mix together the béchamel sauce, cooked pasta, cauliflower, spinach and mozzarella cheese. Place in a greased casserole dish and bake in a preheated 350-degree oven for about 20 to 25 minutes or until the top is golden brown.

Nutrition facts per serving: Calories: 542; Fat: 27g; Saturated fat: 16g; Polyunsaturated fat: 2g; Monounsaturated fat: 8g; Carbohydrates: 58g; Sugar: 7g; Protein: 22g; Sodium: 649mg

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