

C.L.A.W.B.A.C.K your nutrition during cancer treatment

Nutrition can take a battering during cancer treatment. Listen to the podcast with Prof Tracy Burrows and use this checklist to CLAWBACK your nutritional status to protect your appetite, muscle mass, body weight and overall wellbeing. Keep in mind that people really do want to help, so have a nutrition list of ways they could provide practical support.

C - Check in regularly

Health staff often check in with symptoms related to treatment. But it's your responsibility to regularly check in with yourself on the food and nutrition front. Every radiotherapy and chemo treatment and round can be different and hard to predict.

Top things to check in on are **Regular eating, texture, quality and variety**. For long treatment cycles, check in at the start. Like Prof Tracy, you may have to give yourself a kick start multiple times.

L - Lunchbox

This is especially helpful for treatment days. Procedures often take longer than you think, so be prepared for the unexpected. When planned eating goes out the window, having **quick options in your lunchbox** means you won't get caught out. Food doesn't have to be fancy, try **sandwiches, fruit, plain biscuits or rice crackers**.

A - Activity adds up

Regular exercise is important, but it doesn't have to be much. **Anything is better than nothing**. Try a short walk. Invest in some weights or use different things around the house (i.e cans) and try one set of bicep curls. Do whatever takes your fancy and you can manage. Time of day can be important too, choose when you are feeling most energy, often in the morning to kickstart the day.

W - Water

Hydration is so important, but so hard. Fill a drink bottle to help you monitor your intake. **Mix water with lemon, cordial or cold tea**. Room temp options are sometimes better. Try juice or milk poppers or protein drinks like Up & Go, canned coffee, or iced teas from the supermarket.

How can friends, carers and health staff assist?

Check-in on these:

What time of day is best for you?

This gives you insights into the types of food that might be worth trying, e.g. a new breakfast cereal!

Are some textures better than others?

It may be that soft foods are what they want, yoghurts from a sip pack, poppers with a straw may be easier to manage.

Offer to provide some easy-to-eat snacks to go in the lunch box. Think tubs of fruit, mini packs of plain biscuits. Try salt-reduced vegemite which has added vitamin B12 to help prevent pernicious anaemia.

Offer to walk up the street or driveway or around the back yard with them so they don't have to go by themselves. Rather than just sit and talk. A 'walking catch-up' gives fresh air and exercise can help break a cycle.

Offer to try some new things with the person or have a drink with them at room temp. Not always tea and coffee. Try room temp juice made with fruit. Buy a cold drink and leave it out until it is not ice cold.

B - Best time of day

Ask yourself during your check-in, **What's YOUR best time of the day for nutrition?** Often, it's not dinner. If your best nutrition time is the morning, then change up your foods to increase variety and boost protein and other nutrient-rich foods. Tell others as they could help with ideas for that time of day.

Breakfast is commonly before treatment, so that's a good time to boost nutrition, especially if you think your day might go pear shaped later.

A - Anything is better than nothing

This applies to food and physical activity. **Don't go too long without eating** as hunger can contribute feelings of nausea or worsen other gut symptoms, like constipation or diarrhoea.

C - Coffee to count

Lots of people like coffee and have at least one per day. Use it as an easy way to get some extra nutrients in. Try a coffee flavoured **nutritional supplement, like coffee flavoured Sustagen** or mix a vanilla or chocolate flavoured Sustagen with a shot of coffee. Prof Tracy found the coffee flavour is not sweet like many others, and it can be made on water or milk. If you don't like coffee, try another flavour or make it into a milkshake or smoothie and add fresh or frozen fruit for a frappe.

K - Kick in protein

Protein is made of amino acids, the **building blocks of protein and muscle**, and **essential for immunity**. Planning meals ahead helps ensure you don't shortchange yourself on protein. Prof Tracy tried to add something at breakfast and lunch, as well as dinner. Snacks can also be protein rich with yoghurts or crackers and cheese. They can also be on hand in the lunch box.

To learn more about the importance of nutrition in cancer treatment and survivorship, listen to the full Nutrition Science Bites conversation with Prof Clare Collins and Prof Tracy Burrows - a cancer survivor and expert in nutrition and dietetics: **[Can good nutrition improve your response to cancer treatments?](#)**

Ask ... **'How can I help?' and 'tell me about your best time of day!'**

That way you can bring something that they like, which could even be snacks ... just ask.

People don't often talk about what they usually eat for breakfast, so ask others for options get everyone to try the same things as a show of support.

Ask... **'When is the last time you had something to eat?'**

Often people don't know what they feel like. Ask if they would like to have what are you having? You (and they) may be surprised, and you end up with an enjoyable experience sharing a meal.

Try something together...

Offer to have what they have ... it's hard for people watching others eat and drink what they enjoy, when they can't.

Drop in a dinner!

Look at **protein rich recipe options on NMNT website**. Dinner does not always have to be lasagne!!