

Tips for when you do not feel like eating



Side effects of cirrhosis may decrease appetite or make food unpalatable. Below are common reasons why patients find it difficult to eat enough and solutions to overcome these temporary issues.

1 "When I eat, I get full very quickly."

The sensation of early fullness is also called "early satiety". This decreases the amount of food you can eat, and can lead to weight loss and malnutrition.

Suggestions:

- ◆ Eat smaller, more frequent meals and snacks every 2-4 hours.
- ◆ Limit fluid intake when eating to reserve room for food.
- ◆ Avoid drinks like coffee, tea, and water since they can reduce your appetite overall and provide you with little nutrition.

Make your calories count!

Drink high calorie and protein meal replacement drinks or cream soups. These are easier to digest than solid foods and are nutritious.

- High protein smoothie – see Recipes chapter
- Meal replacement drink – see Meal Supplements chapter
- Homemade cream soup
- Pudding, yogurt, and custard

If you are up during the night, grab a quick snack or meal. Eat whenever it is possible!

Make sure not to skip meals or snacks.

Alert a healthcare practitioner about fluid retention.



Tip:

Keep a granola bar and meal supplement in the nightstand or bathroom for easy access during the night.



2

"I'm too tired to cook and eat."

Feeling extra tired is common in cirrhosis. This can interrupt grocery shopping, cooking, and even eating. Naps during the day may also cause meals or snacks to be missed unintentionally. Eating is so important because it provides the essential nutrients that can help with tiredness.



Suggestions:

When you have more energy, prepare meals in advance to store in the fridge or freezer, like:

- Hearty soups, stews, or chili
- Packaging leftovers into homemade, inexpensive "TV dinners"

Consider meal delivery programs, such as 'Meals on Wheels'.

- If "heart-healthy" options are available, choose these as they are usually lower in salt than other options – remember to check the label!
- Look into meal-prep businesses – the meal is assembled at their kitchen but is cooked at home. The benefit is that the groceries are purchased and already washed or even chopped or measured.

Use grocery shopping services offered by supermarkets or community programs; some stores have online ordering options.

Rely on simple-to-prepare meals and snacks presented in Chapter 5.

Use meal supplements during the day and night as needed!

Ask friends and family for support by :

- Cooking and eating together
- Sharing meals
- Have a support person or friend prepare meals or snacks when possible

Avoid prepared foods and take out foods! These will only make the symptoms worse and may hurt the liver! Patients with cirrhosis may experience day/night reversal - this means a person is awake during the night and naps during the day. If this occurs, have 1 or 2 snacks between naps during the daytime and eat meals during the night.



3

"On days I have procedures or am admitted to the hospital, it is impossible to stick to a regular eating schedule."

Appointments, tests, procedures, and hospital admissions can take a while. In some cases, "fasting" is also required which makes it more challenging to fit in all of the meals and snacks. Nevertheless, it is important to stick as closely as possible to a regular eating schedule to help the liver.

Suggestions:

Eat a large meal just before midnight if required to fast overnight. Take a lunch bag packed with items that will not spoil to every appointment, procedure, or hospital admission:

- Include meal supplements, such as Boost® or Ensure®
- Snack bag of unsalted nuts or trail mix
- High-protein granola or cereal bars

4

“I don’t have enough money to buy food.”

A healthy liver diet does not have to be expensive. The higher costs of fresh meat and dairy products means that it is important to watch for sales, look for alternative protein sources, and be creative to make the most of the grocery budget.

Suggestions:

- Only shop the outermost aisles in a grocery store. These include the bakery, produce, dairy, and meat sections. This avoids the junk food aisles and prepackaged foods.
Purchasing healthier, lower-sodium foods will also reduce grocery costs
- Watch for sales
- Portion out bulk foods into serving sizes that can be stored and used as needed
 - ◆ Buying meats in bulk can save a lot of money!
- Join grocery store clubs or programs - most offer discounts and specials to members
- Instead of expensive meats, try substituting vegetable-based proteins, such as beans, lentils, and chickpeas.
 - ◆ These are low-cost protein sources that provide excellent nutrition
- If you are receiving social support, you may qualify for additional funding to cover the costs of a low-sodium diet.
 - ◆ Talk to a healthcare provider to see if you qualify.

