

Department of
NUTRITION & DIETETICS

Ways to Promote Oral Intake



Poor Oral Intake

Reasons for Poor Oral Intake

Poor oral intake or a loss of appetite may be contributed by:

1. **Gastrointestinal symptoms (e.g. vomiting, nausea)**
2. **Early satiety***
3. **Taste changes**
4. **Difficulties in swallowing and eating**
5. **Reduced interest in foods**

These can be due to illnesses such as cancer, respiratory issues, dementia, stroke or if you are undergoing treatments (e.g. chemotherapy, radiation therapy).

Certain medications and dental problems can also cause you to have poor oral intake.

*Satiety = feeling full quickly after eating

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Why is Poor Oral Intake a Concern?

A prolonged period of poor oral intake can lead to malnutrition and cause the following:

- Reduced immunity, leading to an increased risk of infections
- Loss of muscles and strength, leading to an increased risk of falls
- Poor wound healing, leading to an increased risk of complications e.g. sacral sores
- Slower recovery, leading to a longer hospital stay

What Should I Do If I Have Poor Oral Intake?

Inform your doctor so that he/she can investigate the cause of your poor oral intake. A review of your medications can be helpful as they may contribute to a poor appetite.

A dentist or speech therapist or occupational therapist can help if there are any chewing, swallowing or functional issues affecting your oral intake.

Dietary Strategies in Various Causes of Poor Oral Intake

Causes	Solutions
Early Satiety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have small, frequent meals with high energy/high protein snacks (e.g. red bean soup) in between your meals • Fortify your food with high energy and/or protein condiments such as sesame oil, eggs, creams and spreads (e.g. peanut butter/soft margarine) • Avoid drinking for an hour before or during your meal and at least 20 minutes after eating because fluids can make you feel full • Have nourishing fluids (e.g. milk, soya milk) instead of water • Consider the use of oral nutritional supplements
Taste changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Add herbs, spices or sauces/seasonings and condiments to enhance the flavours of your food • Add citrus fruits like lemon/lime to your food or beverages to stimulate your appetite • Serve your food warm to bring out the aroma of the food
Difficulties in Eating (e.g. Chewing and Swallowing Difficulties)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speak to your speech therapist for advice on the most suitable texture of foods and consistency of drinks to ease chewing and swallowing • See a dentist if you have issues with your dentures • Speak to your occupational therapist for advice on specialised utensils that would help with feeding • Consider the use of oral nutritional supplements as modified diets tend to have reduced nutritional content

Dietary Strategies in Various Causes of Poor Oral Intake

Causes	Solutions
Loss of Appetite	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have your largest meal when your appetite is the best • Have your favourite food at any time of the day • Prepare and cook larger quantities of food and store them in single serves so that you will always have readily prepared meals available • Increase your physical activity at a comfortable pace. This may stimulate your appetite (e.g. taking a short walk an hour before meals can make you hungry) • Have your meals with pleasant music and/or with friends and family • Portion your meals on a small plate if food on a larger plate causes you to feel overwhelmed
Reduced Interest in Foods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have your meals/snacks at regular timings daily • Try a variety of different foods (e.g. a variety of colours, textures, smells, flavours) to help increase your interest in eating • Make mealtimes more enjoyable (e.g. eat your meals with brightly coloured utensils) to improve the appeal of your food • Consider the use of oral nutritional supplements

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