

Further information

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**WE ARE
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CANCER SUPPORT**

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from many sources including research with 200 people living with advanced cancer.

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LIVING WITH DISAGREEMENTS ABOUT FOOD

Information to help people living with cancer



University
of Southampton | School of Nursing
and Midwifery

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Are you living with advanced cancer? Do you find that you disagree with other people over what you should eat?

This leaflet will tell you what other people have found helpful when living with disagreements about food.

Tips to help you

Many people living with cancer find that they eat less than they used to. You might find that your smaller appetite causes you to disagree with others over what you should eat.

I don't mean to be awkward; I just can't eat very much

There are two very common misunderstandings about eating that often cause disagreements:

- others may not realise that your cancer is causing your lack of appetite and think that you are just not trying to eat
- others may try to help in ways that you find upsetting.

I find others think that I'm not trying to eat

Other family members may find it difficult to understand the change in your eating habits. They may have never lost their appetite.

It can be helpful to tell them what is happening to you. Describe the things that you think they will be able to imagine. For example, describe something as being so dry and bland it tastes like cardboard, or that you feel you will be sick if you take one more mouthful.

I get upset when others give me advice about what to eat

You may find others have ideas about what you should eat. They may encourage you to eat foods that you find unpleasant.

If you are living with advanced cancer, it is your quality of life that is important. Think about what you enjoy and what you can manage to eat. Then choose the foods or drinks that will give you energy and protein. You will then be eating well without letting food have a negative impact on your quality of life.

It puts me off my food when others watch me eat or comment on what I eat

Food is often used as a reward or a way of showing that we care. For example, we take gifts of food and drink to a party.

If someone has prepared food for you and you are unable to eat it, they may feel rejected. Try to notice the things that they do that are helpful and tell them. For example, if talking about food puts you off eating, tell your family how helpful it has been when they haven't talked about food for a time.

Another solution is to ask to eat on your own. You can then eat what you want in your own time. Some people find it best to help themselves to tinned, frozen or refrigerated food when they fancy. Friends and family might find it helpful if you make suggestions about where you would like to eat, and how you would like food served – perhaps you would like to serve your own portion too.

I don't want to hurt people's feelings when they are trying to help me

It can be difficult to talk to others about how you feel and what you would like. It may help to show them this leaflet or the leaflet called *Helping someone live with change in their eating habits*.