



**NeuroEndocrine  
Cancer** Australia

# Diet

## Why diet is important

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There are a number of reasons why focusing on diet and healthy eating is important for NETs patients.

Eating well can:

- Help you cope better with treatment
- Assist in healing. This is important after surgery, chemotherapy, radiotherapy or other medical treatment
- Improve your body's immune system, its natural defense
- Help you maintain your weight and feel better in yourself. This is important even if you are not having treatment.

For those who are not losing weight, have symptoms controlled well and are otherwise well on no other prescribed diet, their focus should be to follow a healthy eating diet. This should be high in foods such as fruit, vegetables and wholegrains but low in nutrients such as salt, saturated fat and added sugar. Choose from a range of natural colours; at least three vegetable and two fruit portions a day.

Some NETs patients may need to seek advice about the right foods. Patients with pancreatic NETs in particular may have more complex needs and should seek guidance from an experienced nutritionist. See the Neuroendocrine Cancer Australia website for our [Nutrition Booklet](#).

## Carcinoid trigger foods

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For some patients certain foods and drinks can trigger symptoms such as abdominal pain, diarrhea and flushing. The types of foods/drinks that cause this reaction vary. The most reliable method of identifying them is with a food and symptom diary. The diary is completed over a 2-4 week period and includes foods eaten, medications and any symptoms experienced afterwards. If you identify a 'trigger food', try reducing the portion size. If this does not help, you may need to exclude it completely from your diet. Possible common triggers include:

- Size of meal
- Fat content
- Spice and alcohol
- Meals moderate to high in amines (e.g. aged cheese, smoked/salted fish & meat)

## Common issues and strategies

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### Weight loss

It is important not to ignore loss of weight. Progressive loss of weight may be as a result of a number of problems, so you should discuss this with your doctor, nurse specialist and dietitian.

### General tips to boost your intake:

- Eat “little and often”
- Small frequent meals and snacks may be easier for you to manage rather than the traditional three meals per day
- Have snacks in between your meals
- Eat when you feel hungry
- Use convenience foods (ready meals, canned foods, frozen foods) if you are too tired to prepare meals.

### Tips to increase your protein and energy intake:

- Eat foods rich in protein, meat, poultry, fish, eggs, dairy products (milk, yoghurt, cheese) pulses and nuts
- Have foods rich in energy, oils, nuts, butter, margarine, and any other foods high in fat and sugar. Use full-fat dairy products (e.g. whole milk, full fat cheese, full cream yoghurt, double cream)
- Have fortified milk: add 3 -4 tablespoons of skimmed milk powder to 1 pint of milk. Use in the same way that you would ordinary milk
- When having breakfast: use fortified milk or neutral flavoured supplement drinks. Try adding dried fruit, nuts, sugar, honey, yoghurt, evaporated milk or cream
- Stews or casseroles; add noodles, lentils or beans. Stir in cream or sour cream
- Soups or sauces; make with fortified milk or add grated cheese, double cream, butter or oil
- Desserts; add ice cream, cream, evaporated milk, condensed milk, jam, honey, golden syrup, lemon curd, dried fruit, nuts or chocolate
- Use fortified milk to make milky desserts (e.g. custard)
- Sandwiches, toast, plain biscuits or jacket potatoes; add butter, margarine, mayonnaise, cheese, peanut butter, olives or avocado

### Tips to increase your protein and energy intake *(continued)*:

- Vegetable; add grated cheese, oil, butter or margarine
- Salads; use oil, mayonnaise, salad cream, salad dressing, Greek yoghurt, nuts or seeds
- Try using fortified milk in hot chocolate, smoothies or other high energy drinks
- If necessary, your dietitian may advise you to get a prescription of supplement drinks

### Diarrhoea

Diarrhoea may be a result of many things in NETs including the tumour-secreting hormones, treatment, intolerance to food or an infection. Here are some things to try;

- If you have diarrhoea and you have not started a new treatment, see your doctor as you may have an infection
- Eat little and often
- Reduce insoluble fibre (e.g. bran, wheat germ) but increase soluble fibre in diet (oats, apricots, high fruit jams)
- Cook and peel fruit and vegetables
- Juice ‘without bits’ rather than whole products / smoothies
- Non-dairy, multi-strain probiotics (check with your doctor if you are on chemotherapy)

### Wind and bloating

This problem can accompany diarrhoea and constipation. Here are some tips to help;

- Avoid gas-forming foods (e.g. onions, garlic, cabbage, pulses, cauliflower broccoli, nuts and spicy foods)
- Trial a low fibre diet
- Avoid fizzy drinks and chewing / bubble gum
- Skipping meals is more likely to cause wind, therefore eat regular meals
- Chew your food well to reduce the amount of air swallowed
- Monitor bowel movements and speak to your doctor or nurse if the problem persists

## How do I know if I am not absorbing fat appropriately?

If you have diarrhoea and/or your stools appear pale, oily, float or are hard to flush, then this might indicate that you are not absorbing fat as you should. Talk to your doctor, nurse or dietitian if your stools appear different or if you have diarrhoea. If your doctor or dietitian thinks you may have problems absorbing fat, they may recommend you take pancreatic enzyme tablets to help with this. Creon is a common brand of pancreatic enzymes and is taken at the beginning of meal times. – refer to the Vitamin / Dietary Fact Sheet on the Neuroendocrine Cancer Australia website.

## Nausea and vomiting

You may feel nauseous or vomit for several reasons. Please tell your treatment team so they can investigate possible causes.

- Eat small, frequent meals throughout the day to avoid feeling full
- Take little sips of nutritious drinks between meals rather than with them
- Avoid cooking smells if possible
- Cold food and drinks usually have less smell than hot cooked foods
- Seek out tart flavours (e.g. citrus juices, sorbets and lemon curd) and salty and minty flavours
- Eat plain biscuits, crackers or dry toast
- Avoid greasy or fatty foods
- Try ginger extract in foods or drinks (e.g. crystallised stem and fresh ginger in stir fries / juices / grated onto salads)

*“Regular exercise such as walking has been shown to reduce muscle wasting and fatigue, as well as nausea and vomiting, and can help some people sleep better”  
(NET Specialist)*

## When to ask for help

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It is important to note that this is only a basic guide. It is important to discuss your needs with your treatment team, particularly if you have weight loss, diarrhoea or any other prolonged symptoms.



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