



Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust  
Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust

# Eating well in hospital

## Information for patients



---

**This advice aims to support you during your stay in hospital and gives tips on improving appetite and food intake. The advice can also be used at home.**

**There are other dietary advice leaflets that you may find useful at home; please discuss with your clinical team if you would like more information.**

---

## **Why is it important to eat well in hospital?**

When you are unwell it is common to 'lose' your appetite and not to eat as much as usual. During illness, you may need to eat more and it may be difficult to eat enough to meet your need for energy, protein, fat, vitamins and minerals. This may result in weight loss and can lead to delays in recovery. If you are not eating well you are more likely to be at risk of malnutrition (weakness/poor health due to a lack of nutritious food), which can cause:

- Longer hospital stays.
- Increased risk of illness, infection and slower wound healing.
- Increased nausea and constipation.
- Increased risk of falls.
- Low mood and reduced quality of life.
- Reduced energy, reduced muscle strength and inability to carry out daily activities.

## **What are the symptoms of malnutrition?**

You may be malnourished if you have any of the following:

- Unplanned weight loss – which can cause clothes, dentures, belts or jewellery to become loose.
- Tiredness and lack of energy.
- Lack of interest in food and/or drink.
- Loss of muscle strength.

## Tips to help improve your appetite in hospital

Although you may not feel like eating, appetite is often stimulated by eating, so you might find the following advice useful:

- **Eat 'little and often'** – try a small snack between meals and a dessert after lunch and evening meal.
- **Get comfortable before eating** – ensure you sit upright or try to sit in the chair.
- Maintain **good oral hygiene** – clean your teeth twice a day.
- **Avoid filling up on drinks just before or during meals** to avoid feeling too full to eat.
- **Ensure drinks** are an easy way to get extra energy, protein, vitamins and minerals and are available on the ward in different flavours – just ask ward staff. You can drink them between meals. You can also mix them with milk, juice or water.
- **Include a dessert after your main meal** – such as sponge or crumble with custard, rice or semolina pudding, yoghurt, ice cream, cheese and biscuits. You can order double portions of these on the hospital menu card.
- Let your nurse know if you have any **swallowing difficulties**.
- Relatives are welcome to **bring in your favourite foods** (non-refrigerated packaged snack items).
- You could **go to the hospital restaurant** to get more food options – ward staff can provide you with free-meal vouchers.
- Aim to have **nourishing drinks** like milk, hot chocolate, Horlicks, fruit juice and smoothies throughout the day.
- **Avoid soups** if possible. These fill you up but have poor calorific / protein value.
- If you suffer from nausea or vomiting, it is best to order plain foods, e.g. toast, jacket potatoes, rice or mashed potato,

## What meals are available in hospital?

- You can request a cooked breakfast – please ask the ward-staff to provide a meal voucher.
- Snack boxes and hot meals are available if you miss a meal.
- **Ask for an alternative menu list** (hot and cold main meals, puddings and finger foods).
- Vegan, vegetarian, Halal, Kosher, Afro-Caribbean menus are available for all.
- Don't be afraid to ask for a nourishing drink, or if snacks are available. The following are available to be ordered directly from catering, so please add to your menu when choosing your food:
  - Ambrosia rice pudding or custard pot
  - Muffins – lemon or chocolate flavour
  - Full fat yoghurt
  - Dairylea cheese triangles or cheese and biscuits
- Biscuits and individual cakes (Genoa, Madeira, chocolate) are listed on the patient menu card.
- The following are also available on the ward:

○ Toast or bread	○ Cream crackers
○ Honey	○ Whole milk
○ Peanut butter/Marmite	○ Horlicks
○ Butter/margarine	○ Hot chocolate
○ Jam/marmalade	○ Cereals
○ Biscuits	○ Porridge (Ready Brek)
- Please ask ward staff for assistance if you miss a meal or want a nourishing drink.
- If you would like to provide feedback on the food, please ask to speak to a member of the catering staff.

Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust Dietitians, November 2022.

Next review due: November 2024