

Nutrition supplements

For people with cancer who need extra nutrition

What are nutrition supplements?

Nutrition supplements are drinks or powders that provide extra calories and/or protein. Side effects from cancer or treatment may make it difficult to eat. Nutrition supplements can help you meet your nutrition needs when food is not enough. Different types of nutrition supplements include:



- **Complete nutrition drinks** like Ensure® and Boost®. These drinks have calories, protein and all the nutrients your body needs.
- **Protein powders** like Beneprotein® and Boost® Just Protein™. These add extra protein when mixed with food or drinks.
- **Juice-type drinks** like Boost® Fruit Flavoured Beverage and Ensure® Clear. These provide extra nutrition but are missing some important nutrients. They should not be the only food you eat.

If you are eating less than usual or losing weight, nutrition supplements may help to improve your nutrition by providing extra calories and protein. Talk to a dietitian for more information.

Which nutrition supplement should I choose?

1. **Find a taste you like.** If you enjoy the taste you are more likely to drink it and benefit from the extra nutrition.
2. **Find a nutrition supplement that meets your nutrition needs.**
 - Choose higher calorie nutrition supplements, like Boost® 2.24, Ensure® Plus Calories, Boost® Plus, and Ensure® Advance, if you are losing weight. These drinks provide more calories and protein than other nutrition supplements.
 - Mix protein powder into your food or drinks if you are not eating enough protein.
 - Choose juice-type drinks if you are having mouth problems and cannot swallow creamy drinks.
 - Most nutrition supplements, including milky ones, are lactose-free. Check the package for more information.
 - If you have diabetes or kidney disease, ask your dietitian if you would benefit from specialized nutrition supplements, like Glucerna®, Boost® Diabetic, Nepro® or Novasource® Renal.
3. **Find an ONS that fits your budget.**
 - Generic brands, like Equate™ Meal Replacement and President's Choice® Ultra Shake, can provide similar nutrition and usually cost less.
 - You can also make nutrition supplements at home. See our “Smoothies and shakes” resource to learn how to make your own high-calorie and protein drinks.

How do I use nutrition supplements?

If you are losing weight, try increasing the servings of nutrition supplements you have each day.

- Try to eat your regular meals, and sip on nutrition supplements drinks between meals.
- If cannot eat your regular meals, drink a nutrition supplement instead of skipping the meal.
- Drink nutrition supplements instead of lower-calorie drinks, like water, juice, and pop.
- Add protein or skim milk powder to soft foods, like oatmeal or congee, for more protein.
- Drink as many nutrition supplements as feels good for you, unless the package says otherwise.

If your weight is stable (stays the same), it usually means your body is getting enough nutrition.

What if I don't like the taste?

- If they are too sweet, add a pinch of salt or mix with 3.25% cow milk, soy milk, or plain yogurt.
- Change the temperature – refrigerate, serve over ice, or slightly warm your nutrition supplement drink. Try freezing it into popsicles or ice cubes.
- Drink from a straw or use a cup with a lid if the smell bothers you.
- Try different flavours so you don't get bored. Add instant coffee, flavoured syrups, or cinnamon to your nutrition supplement.
- Blend with fruit to make a smoothie, or ice cream to make a milkshake.



Where can I find more information?

Talk to a dietitian if you are eating less than usual or have lost weight. A dietitian can help you pick the nutrition supplement that is right for you. Dietitians can also tell you about other food and drink options to help you meet your nutritional needs.

If you are tired of drinking nutrition supplements try using them in recipes. These websites have both sweet and savory recipes to try.

- Ensure® recipes: [ensure.com/recipes](https://www.ensure.com/recipes)
- Boost® recipes: [madewithnestle.ca/boost/recipes](https://www.madewithnestle.ca/boost/recipes)

Note: This is not a full list of brands or products. The Odette Cancer Centre does not recommend one brand over another. Talk to your dietitian if you need help understanding how this information applies to you.

If you are a patient at the Odette Cancer Centre and you would like more nutrition information, please visit the Patient & Family Support office in TG 230 (T-wing, ground floor, room 230), call 416-480-4623, or visit [sunnybrook.ca/cancernutrition](https://www.sunnybrook.ca/cancernutrition)

This resource should be used for information and does not replace medical advice. For questions, concerns, or additional information, contact your dietitian. This resource is for personal use only.