

# Nutrition and Lymphoma

## OVERVIEW

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Most of us know that good nutrition is essential for a healthy body and mind. When you are diagnosed with lymphoma or chronic lymphocytic leukaemia (CLL), it is especially important that you look after your body by making healthy nutritional choices. Good nutrition can improve your mood, decrease the severity of treatment side effects, speed up post-treatment recovery and reduce the risk of other chronic health conditions. Maintaining healthy food choices in combination with regular exercise may even reduce the risk of lymphoma or CLL returning later in life.

Nutrition plays an important role in every stage of the cancer experience including before, during and following treatment if it is required. The following fact sheet will outline what 'good nutrition' really means, and dispel some of the common myths around healthy eating for people with lymphoma.

## HOW DOES A DIAGNOSIS OF LYMPHOMA IMPACT MY NUTRITIONAL NEEDS?

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A diagnosis of lymphoma or CLL places an extraordinary amount of stress on your body and mind. Consuming a healthy diet full of vital nutrients is one way in which we can support our bodies' ability to cope with the stress of disease and treatment.

Unfortunately, some of the side effects of lymphoma and its treatment may have an impact on your ability to consume a nutritious diet:

- Taste and smell changes
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea and vomiting
- Mouth ulcers
- Abdominal pain and bloating
- Heartburn
- Pain

Many of these side effects can be managed with some simple strategies and appropriate use of medications. It is important that you are honest with your treating team about what factors are making it hard for you to eat and enjoy your food.

## WHO CAN I TALK TO ABOUT NUTRITION?

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It is easy to become overwhelmed with food and diet options after you have been diagnosed with lymphoma or CLL. There is a lot of misleading information in the media and on the internet about diets and cancer, and it can be easy to get caught up in diet trends and fads. The most reliable source of information is your treating team, especially a dietitian specialising in cancer care. Many cancer care centres will refer you to a dietitian for initial assessment and advice. If you have not already been referred, you can always ask for a referral from your nurse or doctor.

## SHOULD I TRY TO LOSE OR GAIN WEIGHT?

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If your treating team has decided that your lymphoma or CLL requires treatment, it is important that you try to maintain a steady weight. This is because most treatments, including chemotherapy, are dosed on your height and weight. Drastic changes in weight may result in changes to the dose will receive.

If you have weight to lose, your haematologist may recommend postponing any attempts at weight loss until after your treatment finishes. Alternatively, if you have lost a significant amount of weight prior to treatment, you will likely be encouraged to gain weight under the supervision of a registered dietitian.

## WHAT SHOULD I EAT?

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There is no specific diet recommended to those diagnosed with cancer. Your nutritional needs are unique to you, your age, your preferences, your comorbidities (other health conditions) and your cultural or spiritual beliefs.

Start by familiarising yourself with the Australian Dietary Guidelines, developed by the National Health and Medical Research Council and the Australian Government. While these are not specific just to people with cancer, they offer an approach to eating for all which promotes health and wellbeing and reduces the risk of diet-related conditions and chronic diseases.

- To achieve and maintain a healthy weight, be physically active and choose amounts of nutritious food and drinks to

meet your energy needs

- Drink plenty of water and enjoy a wide variety of nutritious foods from the five food groups (vegetables, fruit, grains/cereals, meats/alternative and dairy/alternatives) every day
- Limit intake of foods containing saturated fat, added salt, added sugars and alcohol
- Care for your food; prepare and store it safely

For more information and resources, visit Eat For Health at [eatforhealth.gov.au/guidelines](http://eatforhealth.gov.au/guidelines)

## COMMON MYTHS AROUND NUTRITION AND CANCER

Unfortunately, there is a lot of incorrect information in the media and on the internet about cancer and diets which can be very overwhelming. It can be difficult to know who's telling the truth and who isn't. Your dietitian will provide the most relevant and up to date information on nutrition specific to your needs, but it may be helpful to familiarise yourself with some common myths around food:

**Sugar causes cancer:** Sugar occurs naturally in many foods including carbohydrates such as grains, pasta and potatoes. The cells of your vital organs and especially your brain require sugar to function and repair themselves. There is no evidence that removing sugar from your diet will decrease the risk of your cancer cells growing. While we all should limit added sugar from our diet, cutting all sugar completely may cause more damage than good.

**Organic food is superior:** Organic fruits and vegetables contain the same amount of nutrients and vitamins as non-organic fruits and vegetables. Organic products are much more costly, and there is no significant evidence that consuming them will prevent disease or cancer.

**I should be detoxing/fasting/juicing:** Be aware that there are many companies in Australia and overseas who prey on vulnerable people to sell their ideas and products. Diets such as detoxing, fasting or juicing may make big claims about health and wellness, they may even claim to treat your cancer or side effects. Many of these diets can cause severe dehydration and malnutrition, which can worsen side effects and reduce your ability to tolerate treatment.

If you are considering any new diet or approach to eating after you have been diagnosed, it is essential that you discuss this with your dietitian or treating team first.

## RESOURCES AND SUPPORT

Organisation	How can they help?
Lymphoma Australia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lymphoma Australia offers a wide variety of resources and support for people with lymphoma or CLL and their carers. Please visit our website <a href="http://lymphoma.org.au">lymphoma.org.au</a> for further information</li> <li>• Lymphoma Australia Fact sheets &amp; booklets including:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Other lymphoma subtypes</li> <li>• Exercise and lymphoma</li> <li>• Fatigue and lymphoma</li> <li>• Sleep management and lymphoma</li> <li>• Complementary &amp; Alternative therapies</li> <li>• Self-care and lymphoma</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <a href="http://lymphoma.org.au/page/1218/fact-sheets">lymphoma.org.au/page/1218/fact-sheets</a></li> <li>• Lymphoma Australia YouTube Channel: Presentations on a variety of topics about lymphoma subtypes and management. <a href="https://youtube.com/user/LymphomaAustralia">youtube.com/user/LymphomaAustralia</a></li> <li>• Lymphoma Nurse Support Line: 1800 953 081 or email: <a href="mailto:nurse@lymphoma.org.au">nurse@lymphoma.org.au</a></li> <li>• Online private Facebook group: 'Lymphoma Down Under' <a href="http://bit.ly/2mrPA1k">http://bit.ly/2mrPA1k</a></li> </ul>
Australian Cancer Survivorship Centre (ACSC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The ACSC is a unique service based at the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre in Victoria. It provides a comprehensive collection of resources and information for cancer survivors and their carers: <a href="http://petermac.org/services/support-services/australian-cancer-survivorship-centre">petermac.org/services/support-services/australian-cancer-survivorship-centre</a></li> </ul>
Avaana	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avaana is Australia's dedicated wellbeing marketplace. Created for Australians with cancer to find, connect, and book, in real-time, appointments with expert health, fitness and wellbeing practitioners who can support them on their cancer journey. Visit the website for more information: <a href="http://avaana.com.au">avaana.com.au</a></li> </ul>

# FACT SHEET

Organisation	How can they help?
Cancer Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Cancer Council offers a range of services to support people affected by cancer, their families and friends. Services may vary depending on where you live. Visit: <a href="http://cancer.org.au">cancer.org.au</a> or call 13 11 20</li></ul>
CanTeen	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>CanTeen is an organisation working with young people affected by cancer 12-25 years. They have online support chat rooms, phone and face to face counselling as well as fun events and camps <a href="http://canteen.org.au">canteen.org.au</a> or email <a href="mailto:support@canteen.org.au">support@canteen.org.au</a> or call 1800 835 932</li></ul>
Eat For Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Department of Health initiative to provide advice about the amount and kinds of foods that we need to eat for health and wellbeing. Visit: <a href="http://eatforhealth.gov.au">eatforhealth.gov.au</a></li></ul>
Leukaemia Foundation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>The Leukaemia Foundation provide support groups, accommodation and transport assistance for people living with blood cancers and their carers: <a href="http://leukaemia.org.au">leukaemia.org.au</a></li></ul>
WeCan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>WeCan is an Australian supportive care website to help people affected by cancer find the information, resources and support services they may need following a diagnosis of cancer. Visit: <a href="http://wecan.org.au">wecan.org.au</a></li></ul>

This resource was last reviewed and updated January 2020