

Medications and Food

Medications are very important and can be essential in keeping us well.

It is very important that you **do not stop** taking any prescribed medications without advice from your GP or pharmacist.

Timing your meals around medications

- You may be told to take some medications with food, which can help your body to absorb it more slowly and help to reduce any side-effects.
- There are also some medications that must be taken without food to work properly. Sometimes this means going for several hours without eating.
- Your doctor or pharmacist will tell you when to take medications. It is important to listen to their instructions.
- If managing the timing of your medications means you are finding it hard to eat enough, and may be losing weight, speak with your doctor or pharmacist to see if your schedule can be changed. An Accredited Practising Dietitian can help you with planning your meals and snacks.

Vitamin and mineral supplements

- It is very important to tell your doctor about all the medications you take, including any vitamin and mineral supplements.
- Some vitamin and mineral supplements and herbal medicines can make you sick if you take them while taking your medications.

Are there foods I should avoid?

- There are some foods that can interfere with how well particular medications work. Grapefruit is an example of this, but it does not cause problems with all medications.
- If you are on blood thinners (such as warfarin) and start eating lots of foods that contain vitamin K, this can cause issues.
- Some medications must not be taken in combination with alcohol.
- Your doctor or pharmacist should tell you if there are any foods you should avoid, but if you are uncertain be sure to ask.
- Avoid making big changes to your diet without speaking to your doctor or pharmacist first.

Managing common side-effects

Nausea (feeling sick)

Some medications may cause you to feel ill, which can make it harder to eat regular meals and snacks.

- If your medication can be taken with food, have it with a meal or snack.
- Even if you feel sick, avoid skipping meals as an empty stomach can make it worse.
- Try eating 6 to 8 smaller meals each day, rather than big meals.

See the 'Nausea and vomiting' factsheet for more information.

Taste changes

Some medications can affect your sense of smell and taste. You might find you enjoy your favourite foods less, start liking foods you didn't like before or don't feel like eating at all.

- Try experimenting with foods and drinks – you might find you like very different foods to what you are used to.
- If you are experiencing taste changes related to medications and this is concerning you, speak with your doctor or pharmacist.
- An Accredited Practising Dietitian can work with you to help manage taste changes.

See the 'Taste and smell changes' factsheet for more suggestions.

Diarrhoea

There are some medications that commonly cause diarrhoea, including antibiotics and some diabetes tablets.

- Keep hydrated by drinking plenty of fluid.
- Have rehydration fluids as necessary.
- Speak with your doctor or pharmacist if it is ongoing or if you become unwell.

See the 'Diarrhoea' factsheet for more information and a rehydration fluid recipe.

Constipation

Some medications may cause constipation, such as strong pain relief or some anti-nausea drugs. If you don't drink enough fluid or eat enough fibre, you are more likely to become constipated.

- Drink plenty of fluid.
- Make sure you are including some high-fibre foods in your diet. Increase the amount of these foods slowly. Increasing your fibre intake too quickly can make constipation worse.
- Try drinking a glass of pear or prune juice twice a day.
- If constipation is painful or lasts more than a few days, speak with your doctor or pharmacist. They may be able to suggest some gentle laxatives to help.

See the 'Preventing constipation' factsheet for more information.