



Advice from AYAs who've been there

Alex's top tips for **Finding your appetite in hospital**

Alex was diagnosed with AML (Acute Myeloid Leukaemia) when he was 21, which required long hospital stays in both the oncology ward and the Bone Marrow Transplant Unit.

Alex knows how hard it can be to eat during treatment, particularly while in hospital. Here he shares his ideas for how to get food in your belly if you are a young person who has lost their desire to eat.

I've always eaten all the food presented to me, but when I was undergoing cancer treatment this wasn't always possible. We get some pretty sensitive tummies during chemo and I've gotta say the hospital can be severely lacking in delectable food.

I believe a lot of the problems with nutrition for AYAs on treatment isn't the lack of good diet - though I'm sure there are a few cases where this is true - but a problem of not eating much at all!

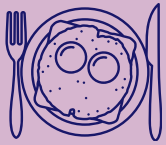
I understand the misery that comes with feeling hungry for the first time in a while only for the same old hospital food to turn up and make you sick again.

So here are my **top ten tips** to help you keep on eating while you are in hospital.

Read this bit first...

Alex is giving this advice based on his own treatment and hospital experiences. But everyone's health needs will be different and some foods might not be suitable or safe for you to eat during a particular point in your treatment.

Before making any changes to your diet or bringing your own food into hospital, it's really important that you talk to your doctor, nurse, or dietician. They'll be able to help you decide what foods and drinks are right for you.



1

If you get sick of looking at those bleak hospital food trays ;

- Get someone to take the food off the tray and onto a plate for you.
- Bring a couch cushion tray or something more homely to eat your food off.
- Have your own special cutlery to use.



2

Try to make sure that if you're stuck in a room feeling sick, you don't receive food at the wrong time. I was lucky to have my mum around most of the time during treatment. She'd make sure to take my food outside if I was going through a sickness spell. The plate can always be microwaved and picked at later.



3

Most things will get repetitive, you'll have one sick spell and what you liked before will be something you won't be able to stomach again for a couple of months. This goes away, but for a time I could not eat fish and chips after throwing those up down the hospital wall!



4

If you start to dislike the look and feel of something, or associate it with sickness, see if you can replace it with something new from home (just make sure you run it past your medical team first).



5

Cancer treatments can make you hyper-sensitive to smells. Try asking someone to remove the plastic dish covers before you get it. I swear if I didn't have to take in that waft of moist air from lifting the dish cover I'd have had a 50% higher chance of eating the food.



6

If you are struggling to figure out what to eat, or chemo brain is getting to you, try to create a list of things you like such as snacks or prepped food.



7

If you're lucky enough to have family and friends that can bring food in for you, don't be afraid to ask for it! You can even put an online shopping cart together of your favourite things that people can easily refer to if they want to get you something.



BeardMeatsFood

8

Eating alone? I started to enjoy watching people eat crazy amounts of food on YouTube. They have mukbang (eating shows) but my favourite is a guy called "BeardMeatsFood" on YouTube. Watching him cleanly demolish a food competition dish of amazing food often made me hungry and gave me ideas of neutropenic food I could ask for!



9

Eating together is also important. I used to enjoy eating with my mum at the same time. Sharing a freshly baked pizza with her was a great luxury and was definitely a meal I could get down (just try not to bring smelly foods into a shared space with other patients).



10

If you can't stay hydrated....

- Ice in the drinks can make them a lot better.
- Drink juice, soda, or flavoured milk - whatever you can get your hands on or get people to bring you.
- Use your own bottle or glass if you have one you'd prefer - those plastic cups aren't as good as a nice cool glass.
- Drinking from a straw is sometimes easier to do than drinking from a cup.

