



# Tips and Recipes for Appetite Loss

Nutrition and Food Services Healthy Teaching Kitchen



**VA**



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

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# My VA Contact Information

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## VA Medical Center Location Name and Address:

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## Oncology Contact(s):

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## Dietitian(s):

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## Tips for Managing Appetite Loss

Loss of appetite is a common side effect of chemotherapy, radiation, and cancer itself. Side effects of treatments such as loss of taste and smell, fatigue, nausea, and stress may also lead to decreased appetite.

It is important to try to eat well during treatment. Your body needs calories and protein to help keep your weight and energy up. Maintaining strength can also make your treatments easier to tolerate.

If you are struggling with a loss of appetite, consider these tips to help:

### Adjust How Much and How Often You Eat

- Eat small meals more often. Try to eat a small amount every 2-3 hours.
- Try to eat larger meals when you feel the best. Often, people feel better earlier in the day or after a nap when they are rested.
- Make every bite count by choosing items high in calories and protein.
- If you have followed specific diet restrictions in the past, talk with your healthcare provider about whether you need to continue these at this time (e.g. low cholesterol, carbohydrate controlled).

### Make Eating Easier

- Have meals that are easy to prepare such as sandwiches or ready-to-eat items.
- Have snacks on hand and close by during the day such as peanut butter and crackers, granola bars, yogurt, cottage cheese, pudding, hard-boiled eggs, nuts, and fruit.

### Keep Mealtimes Enjoyable

- Choose favorite foods, order takeout or go out to a favorite restaurant, listen to music, or eat outside when the weather is nice.
- Use seasonings to enhance flavor, if tolerated.

### Get Moving

- Taking a walk in the fresh air can help improve appetite.

## Look for Alternatives

- Choose items that are room temperature or cold to reduce the smell of foods.
- Avoid drinking liquids with meals, unless they are needed for dry mouth or other swallowing problems.
- If you do not feel like you can eat solid food, consider sipping on nutritional drinks, smoothies, creamy or pureed soups, juices, milk, and other liquids that provide a source of calories and nutrition.

## Keep Track

- Keep a journal to track how much you eat and drink each day.
- Make sure your bowels are moving regularly as constipation can contribute to poor appetite.
- Weigh yourself at least once a week. **Call your healthcare team** if you are losing more than a half pound of weight per week.

## Building High Calorie-High Protein Smoothies and Shakes

Smoothies can be a delicious, fast, and nutritious meal or snack option. The following tips will ensure that your smoothie is nutritionally balanced, with adequate calories and protein. Smoothies can be made in a standing blender, single-serving blender or handheld (immersion) blender. Simply add the ingredients and blend until smooth.

### 1. Add a Base (½-1 cup, based on desired consistency; one type or a combination)

Examples: Milk, non-dairy milk alternative (e.g. soy milk, almond milk, rice milk, coconut milk), coconut water, water, 100% fruit juice. For extra calories, choose whole milk, half and half, or canned coconut milk

### 2. Add Fresh, Frozen, or Canned Fruit (1 cup; one type or a combination)

Examples: Apple, banana, blackberries, blueberries, raspberries, strawberries, cherries, grapes, kiwi, mango, melon, orange, papaya, peach, pear, pineapple. You can also add fresh or frozen spinach or kale for a nutrition boost.

### 4. Add a Protein Source (choose 1)

Examples: ½ cup cottage cheese, ½ cup Greek yogurt, ½ cup silken tofu, ½ cup cooked lentils, ½ cup cooked or canned beans (drained and rinsed), or 1 scoop protein powder

### 5. Add Fat with Fiber (choose 1, or a combination of 2 using the smaller amounts)

Examples: ¼-½ avocado, 1-2 tablespoons chia seeds, 1-2 tablespoons nut butter or seed butter (e.g. peanut butter, almond butter, sunflower butter), 1-2 tablespoons ground flax seeds (flax meal), 1-2 tablespoons wheat germ

## Sample Smoothie Recipes

- **Orange Creamsicle** – ¼ cup milk, ¼ cup orange juice, 1 peeled orange, ½ cup Greek yogurt, 1 tablespoon chia seeds, ¼ teaspoon vanilla extract, 3 ice cubes
- **Peanut Butter Dream** – ½ cup soy milk, 1 banana, ½ cup spinach, ½ cup tofu, 2 tablespoons peanut butter, 1 tablespoon unsweetened cocoa powder

# Strawberry-Vanilla Milkshake

Prep: 5 minutes | Cook: 0 minutes | Total: 5 minutes

Yield: 1 serving | Serving Size: 1 milkshake

## Ingredients

- 1 cup milk of choice (dairy or non-dairy)
- ½ cup vanilla ice cream
- ½ cup fresh or frozen strawberries
- 2 tablespoons dry milk powder
- ¼ teaspoon vanilla extract

## Directions

1. Add the milk, ice cream, strawberries, dry milk powder, and vanilla extract to a blender.
2. Blend until smooth, about 2-3 minutes. You may need to stop and scrape the sides halfway through, depending on the strength of your blender.
3. Serve immediately.

## Recipe Notes

- This milkshake can be made with a variety of fruit such as mango, banana, raspberries, or blueberries.
- Protein powder can be substituted for the dry milk powder.
- If the milkshake is too thick, add 1-3 tablespoons of water or milk and continue blending.

**Nutrition Facts Per Serving: Calories: 365 | Total Fat: 16 g | Saturated Fat: 10 g  
Sodium: 215 mg | Total Carbohydrate: 38 g | Dietary Fiber: 1.5 g | Protein: 16 g**

Submitted by Robin LaCroix, RD, CSO

For more recipes, please visit [www.nutrition.va.gov](http://www.nutrition.va.gov)

# Peanut Butter-Banana Milkshake

Prep: 5 minutes | Cook: 0 minutes | Total: 5 minutes

Yield: 1 serving | Serving Size: 1 milkshake

## Ingredients

- 1 cup milk of choice (dairy or non-dairy)
- ½ cup vanilla or chocolate ice cream
- ½ banana
- 2 tablespoons peanut butter
- 3-4 ice cubes (optional)

## Directions

1. Add the milk, ice cream, banana, peanut butter, and ice cubes (if using) to a blender.
2. Blend until smooth, about 2-3 minutes. You may need to stop and scrape the sides halfway through, depending on the strength of your blender.
3. Serve immediately.

## Recipe Notes

- Another nut or seed butter (e.g. peanut butter, sunflower butter, almond butter, cashew butter) can be substituted for the peanut butter.
- Consider adding 1 tablespoon unsweetened cocoa powder for extra chocolate flavor.
- If the milkshake is too thick, add 1-3 tablespoons of water or milk and continue blending.

Nutrition Facts Per Serving: Calories: 550 | Total Fat: 34 g | Saturated Fat: 14 g  
Sodium: 305 mg | Total Carbohydrate: 47 g | Dietary Fiber: 4 g | Protein: 20 g

Submitted by Robin LaCroix, RD, CSO

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# Island-Style Green Smoothie

Prep: 5 minutes | Cook: 0 minutes | Total: 5 minutes

Yield: 2 servings | Serving Size: 1½ cups

## Ingredients

- 1½ cups milk of choice (dairy or non-dairy)
- 1 cup fresh spinach or ½ cup frozen spinach
- 1 cup frozen mango or pineapple cubes
- 1 banana, peeled
- ¼ avocado, peeled and pitted
- 3-4 ice cubes
- Pinch cinnamon or ground ginger

## Directions

1. Add the milk, spinach, mango or pineapple, banana, avocado, ice cubes, and cinnamon or ginger to a blender.
2. Blend until smooth, about 2-3 minutes. You may need to stop and scrape the sides halfway through, depending on the strength of your blender.
3. Serve immediately.

## Recipe Notes

- Add a 1-3 teaspoons of a sweetener such as honey or maple syrup if more sweetness is desired.
- If the smoothie is too thick, add 1-3 tablespoons of water or milk and continue blending.



Nutrition Facts Per Serving: Calories: 240 | Total Fat: 9 g | Saturated Fat: 3.5 g  
Sodium: 100 mg | Total Carbohydrate: 35 g | Dietary Fiber: 4.5 g | Protein: 8 g

Adapted from [Ventray.com](http://Ventray.com) | Submitted by Robin LaCroix, RD, CSO

For more recipes, please visit [www.nutrition.va.gov](http://www.nutrition.va.gov)

# Energy Balls

Prep: 10 minutes | Chill: 1 hour | Total: 1 hour 10 minutes

Yield: 16 servings | Serving Size: 1 energy ball

## Ingredients

$\frac{3}{4}$  cup old-fashioned (rolled) oats

$\frac{1}{2}$  cup ground flaxseed (flax meal)

$\frac{1}{2}$  cup nut or seed butter (e.g. peanut butter, sunflower butter, almond butter, cashew butter)

$\frac{1}{4}$  cup honey

$\frac{1}{4}$  cup dark chocolate or semi-sweet chocolate chips

$\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon vanilla extract

## Directions

1. Add the oats, flaxseed, nut or seed butter, honey, chocolate chips, and vanilla to a medium mixing bowl.
2. Mix well. It may be easier to mix with clean hands rather than a spoon or a spatula.
3. Roll into 16 balls that are about the same size.
4. Refrigerate for at least 1 hour.
5. Store in an airtight container in the refrigerator.

## Recipe Notes

- These energy balls will keep in an airtight container in the refrigerator for 1 week.

**Nutrition Facts Per Serving: Calories: 100 | Total Fat: 6 g | Saturated Fat: 1.5 g  
Sodium: 40 mg | Total Carbohydrate: 10 g | Dietary Fiber: 1.5 g | Protein: 3 g**

Submitted by Robin LaCroix, RD, CSO

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# Blueberry Protein Pancakes

Prep: 5 minutes | Cook: 10 minutes | Total: 15 minutes

Yield: 3 servings | Serving Size: 3 pancakes

## Ingredients

- 1 banana, peeled
- 4 eggs
- 1 tablespoon ground flaxseed (flax meal)
- 1 tablespoon baking powder
- ¼ teaspoon cinnamon
- Pinch salt
- 1 cup quick oats
- ½ cup fresh or frozen blueberries
- Maple syrup, yogurt, and/or applesauce (optional)

## Directions

1. In a medium mixing bowl, mash the banana with a fork.
2. Add the eggs, flaxseed, baking powder, cinnamon, and salt. Whisk together with the fork until well combined.
3. Add the oats and stir to combine.
4. Fold in the blueberries.
5. Heat a medium or large nonstick skillet over medium heat.
6. Working ¼ cup at a time and around the perimeter of the skillet, portion the batter into the pan, leaving at least ½ inch between each portion of batter.
7. Cook on the first side until bubbles form and pop on the top surface, about 3-4 minutes.
8. Flip all of the pancakes over and cook on the other side until golden-brown, about 1-2 minutes.
9. Repeat Steps 6-8 with any remaining batter.
10. Serve warm, topping with maple syrup, yogurt, and/or applesauce as desired.

## Recipe Notes

- If desired, the ingredients in Steps 1-3 can be combined in a blender or with an electric mixer. Then, fold in the blueberries and proceed with the rest of the recipe as written.

**Nutrition Facts Per Serving: Calories: 200 | Total Fat: 7 g | Saturated Fat: 2 g  
Sodium: 215 mg | Total Carbohydrate: 25 g | Dietary Fiber: 4 g | Protein: 10 g**

Adapted from [PinchofYum.com](http://PinchofYum.com) | Submitted by Robin LaCroix  
For more recipes, please visit [www.nutrition.va.gov](http://www.nutrition.va.gov)



# Chocolate Tofu Mousse with Berries

Prep: 5 minutes | Cook: 5 minutes | Chill: 1 hour | Total: 1 hour 10 minutes

Yield: 4 servings | Serving Size: ½ cup mousse with ¼ cup berries

## Ingredients

¾ cup dark chocolate or semi-sweet chocolate chips

8 ounces tofu (silken or soft tofu works best), drained if packed in liquid (about 1 cup)

1 teaspoon unsweetened cocoa powder

1 tablespoon milk (dairy or non-dairy)

1-2 tablespoons maple syrup or honey, to taste

½ teaspoon vanilla extract

Pinch salt

1 cup fresh berries, trimmed and sliced if needed

## Directions

1. Fill a medium saucepan with an inch or two of water. Bring the water to a simmer over medium-high heat.
2. Add the chocolate chips a heatproof metal or glass bowl and set the bowl over the pot with the simmering water. The bottom of the bowl sit just inside the opening of the saucepan and should not touch the water. If it does, pour out water until it doesn't.
3. Let the chocolate melt, stirring occasionally with a heat-resistant spoon or spatula, until fully melted. Remove the bowl from the saucepan as soon as the last piece melts.
4. Place the tofu, cocoa powder, milk, maple syrup or honey, vanilla, salt, and melted chocolate into a blender or food processor. Blend until very smooth.
5. Place in the refrigerator until fully set, at least 1 hour. This mousse will keep in the refrigerator for up to 3 days.
6. Divide the fresh berries between four serving dishes. Top each dish with the chocolate mousse and serve.

## Recipe Notes

- To melt the chocolate in the microwave, place the chocolate chips in a microwave-safe dish and microwave on High power (default setting) for 15-30 seconds at a time, stirring before starting again, until fully melted.

**Nutrition Facts Per Serving: Calories: 230 | Total Fat: 10 g | Saturated Fat: 5 g  
Sodium: 45 mg | Total Carbohydrate: 30 g | Dietary Fiber: 1 g | Protein: 5 g**

Adapted from [ChocolateCoveredKate.com](http://ChocolateCoveredKate.com) | Submitted by Robin LaCroix, RD, CSO

For more recipes, please visit [www.nutrition.va.gov](http://www.nutrition.va.gov)



# Creamy Vanilla Custard

Prep: 5 minutes | Cook: 15 minutes | Total: 20 minutes

Yield: 4 servings | Serving Size: ½ cup

## Ingredients

1⅔ cups whole or 2% (reduced fat) milk

5½ tablespoons sugar, divided

4 egg yolks

3 tablespoons cornstarch

1 tablespoon butter

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

## Directions

1. Add the milk and 4 tablespoons of the sugar to a saucepan and set over medium-low heat. Heat until gently steaming.
2. While the milk mixture heats, in a small to medium mixing bowl, whisk together the egg yolks with the cornstarch and the remaining 1½ tablespoons sugar.
3. Add the egg yolk mixture to the warm milk mixture.
4. Whisk constantly until the mixture thickens enough to coat the back of a spoon, about 3-5 minutes. This will happen around 185°F if checking with a thermometer.
5. Remove the saucepan from the heat and add the butter.
6. Let sit to cool slightly for 5 minutes.
7. Stir in the vanilla.
8. Serve warm, or chill in the refrigerator until ready to serve.
9. To store, transfer the custard to a clean bowl and place plastic wrap over the surface of the custard to keep a skin from forming. This custard will keep in the refrigerator for up to 3 days.

## Recipe Notes

- This recipe can be made with a non-dairy milk alternative (e.g. soy milk, almond milk, oat milk) if desired.

**Nutrition Facts Per Serving: Calories: 220 | Total Fat: 9 g | Saturated Fat: 4.5 g  
Sodium: 80 mg | Total Carbohydrate: 28 g | Dietary Fiber: 0 g | Protein: 6 g**

Submitted by Robin LaCroix, RD, CSO

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# Avocado Chocolate Mousse

Prep: 5 minutes | Cook: 5 minutes | Total: 10 minutes

Yield: 4 servings | Serving Size: ½ cup

## Ingredients

- ½ cup dark chocolate or semi-sweet chocolate chips, melted
- 2 ripe avocados, halved, pits and peels removed
- ¼ cup unsweetened cocoa powder
- ¼ cup sugar-based sweetener (e.g. sugar, honey, maple syrup, agave)
- 3 tablespoons milk (dairy or non-dairy)
- ½ teaspoon vanilla extract
- ⅛ teaspoon salt

## Directions

1. Place the chocolate chips in a microwave-safe dish and microwave on High power (default setting) for 15-30 seconds at a time, stirring before starting again, until fully melted.
2. Add the avocado, cocoa powder, sweetener, milk, vanilla, salt, and melted chocolate to a blender or food processor.
3. Blend until completely smooth, about 2-3 minutes. You may need to stop and scrape the sides halfway through, depending on the strength of your blender or food processor.
4. Serve right away, or chill in the refrigerator until ready to serve. This mousse will keep in the refrigerator for up to 3 days.

## Recipe Notes

- Consider serving topped with fresh berries, banana slices, and/or whipped cream.

Nutrition Facts Per Serving: Calories: 320 | Total Fat: 20 g | Saturated Fat: 6 g  
Sodium: 100 mg | Total Carbohydrate: 36 g | Dietary Fiber: 8 g | Protein: 5 g

Adapted from [ChocolateCoveredKate.com](http://ChocolateCoveredKate.com) | Submitted by Robin LaCroix, RD, CSO

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# Peanut Noodles with Broccoli

Prep: 10 minutes | Cook: 15 minutes | Total: 25 minutes

Yield: 4 servings | Serving Size: 1¼ cups

## Ingredients

8 ounces whole-wheat spaghetti (half of a 12-ounce box)

2 cups broccoli florets

### Sauce

¼ cup peanut butter

3 tablespoons soy sauce

3 tablespoons rice vinegar

1 tablespoon maple syrup

1 tablespoon fresh grated ginger (or ½ tsp ground ginger)

1 clove garlic, minced (about ½-1 teaspoon)

Pinch cayenne or crushed red pepper flakes (optional)

## Directions

1. Fill a large saucepan or stockpot halfway to two-thirds full with water.
2. Bring the water to a boil over high heat.
3. Add the spaghetti to the boiling water and cook according to the package directions. Add the broccoli to the boiling pasta water when there is 3 minutes of cooking time left.
4. Drain the pasta and broccoli into a colander or strainer, then transfer them back into the pot.
5. While the pasta cooks, add the peanut butter, soy sauce, rice vinegar, maple syrup, ginger, garlic, and cayenne or red pepper (if using) to a bowl or a jar with a lid. Whisk or shake together until well combined to make a sauce.
6. Add the sauce to the cooked pasta and broccoli. Toss with tongs or a pasta fork to coat.
7. Serve warm, or chill in the refrigerator until ready to serve.

## Recipe Notes

- Add shredded cooked chicken or baked tofu for a complete meal.
- Use lite (reduced-sodium) soy sauce to lower the sodium content.

**Nutrition Facts Per Serving: Calories: 325 | Total Fat: 10 g | Saturated Fat: 1.5 g  
Sodium: 770 mg | Total Carbohydrate: 51 g | Dietary Fiber: 8.5 g | Protein: 14 g**

Submitted by Robin LaCroix, RD, CSO

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# Cheesy Vegetable Frittata

Prep: 10 minutes | Cook: 35 minutes | Total: 45 minutes

Yield: 4 servings | Serving Size: 2 muffin frittatas or ¼<sup>th</sup> of a pie plate frittata

## Ingredients

6 eggs  
2 tablespoons milk (dairy or non-dairy)  
¼ teaspoon salt  
½ cup shredded or crumbled cheese (e.g. cheddar, feta, parmesan)  
1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil  
2-3 cups trimmed and chopped vegetables (one type or a combination; e.g. tomatoes, bell peppers, broccoli, spinach, mushrooms, onions)  
Nonstick cooking spray  
¼ cup chopped fresh basil, divided

## Directions

1. Preheat the oven to 350°F.
2. Add the eggs, milk, and salt to a medium mixing bowl. Whisk just until the egg yolks and whites are blended.
3. Stir in the cheese, then set the mixture aside.
4. Heat a large skillet or sauté pan over medium heat.
5. Add the oil and heat until shimmering.
6. Add the vegetables, except any leafy greens (e.g. spinach; if using). Cook until tender, then add any leafy greens (if using) and cook until wilted.
7. Remove the pan with the cooked vegetables from the heat and let sit to cool for a few minutes.
8. Stir the cooked vegetables into the egg mixture.
9. Spray the inside of a pie plate or muffin tin cups with cooking spray.
10. Pour the egg mixture into the pie plate or divide over the muffin tin cups.
11. Bake until the eggs are puffed and appear cooked, and the center is no longer runny. This will be about 20-25 minutes if cooking in a pie plate, or about 13-17 minutes if cooking in a muffin tin.
12. Place the pie plate or muffin tin on a cooling rack to cool.
13. Serve warm, sprinkling with the chopped basil as desired.

## Recipe Notes

- For a richer texture, substitute half-and-half for the milk or replace 1 tablespoon of milk with 1 tablespoon of heavy cream.

Nutrition Facts Per Serving: Calories: 220 | Total Fat: 16 g | Saturated Fat: 5.5 g  
Sodium: 330 mg | Total Carbohydrate: 4 g | Dietary Fiber: 1 g | Protein: 13 g

Adapted from [CookieAndKate.com](http://CookieAndKate.com) | Submitted by Robin LaCroix, RD, CSO

For more recipes, please visit [www.nutrition.va.gov](http://www.nutrition.va.gov)

# Hearty Zuppa Toscana

Prep: 15 minutes | Cook: 45 minutes | Total: 60 minutes

Yield: 4 servings | Serving Size: 2 cups

## Ingredients

1 pound turkey or chicken Italian sausage, chopped or sliced if in casings or crumbled if loose

1 large onion, diced (about 1½-2 cups)

2 garlic cloves, minced (about 1-2 teaspoons)

½ teaspoon salt

½ teaspoon black pepper

½ teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes (optional)

2 large russet potatoes, halved and then cut into ¼-inch slices

4 cups (32 ounces) reduced-sodium vegetable or chicken broth

2 cups plus 2 teaspoons water, divided

2 teaspoons flour or cornstarch

2 tablespoons water

2 cups chopped fresh or frozen kale

1 cup half-and-half or whole milk

## Directions

1. Heat a large stockpot or Dutch oven over medium-high heat.
2. Add the sausage and cook until browned, about 5-7 minutes.
3. Add the onion, garlic, salt, pepper, and red pepper flakes (if using). Cook until the onion is softened and translucent, about 3-5 minutes.
4. Add the potatoes, broth, and 2 cups of the water. Stir to combine.
5. Bring the liquid to a simmer over high heat, then reduce the heat to medium.
6. Cook uncovered, stirring occasionally, until the potatoes are tender, about 15-20 minutes. Leave the pot on the heat.
7. In a small bowl, use a fork to whisk together the flour or cornstarch with the remaining 2 teaspoons water. This mixture is called a slurry.
8. Add the slurry mixture to the soup and continue cooking for 15 minutes. Again, leave the pot on the heat.
9. Reduce the heat to low and add the kale. Cook until the kale is wilted and slightly tender, about 5-7 minutes.
10. Turn off the heat and slowly stir in the half-and-half or milk.
11. Serve warm.

## Recipe Notes

- Try substituting bone broth for the vegetable or chicken broth. Bone broth provides additional nutrients and protein.

Nutrition Facts Per Serving: Calories: 360 | Total Fat: 12 g | Saturated Fat: 6.5 g  
Sodium: 890 mg | Total Carbohydrate: 43 g | Dietary Fiber: 6 g | Protein: 23 g

Adapted from Food.com | Submitted by Robin LaCroix, RD, CSO

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