

UNMET NUTRITIONAL NEEDS AND CONCERNS OF INDIVIDUALS LIVING WITH CANCER

Jacqueline Daly, European Cancer Patient Coalition (ECPC) Board
Member



European Cancer
Patient Coalition

ECPC Background

- ECPC is the largest cancer patient's umbrella organisation in Europe.
- Over 450 members in 48 countries including EU member states.
- Voice of cancer patients, carers and survivors since 2003.
- ECPC advocates for patients to be acknowledged as equal partners and co-creators of their own health.
- Working toward a Europe of equality – access to the best treatment and care available through their life.



NUTRITION AND CANCER: WHY IT IS IMPORTANT

- Nutrition and cancer care is a vital component in a patient's treatment and recovery. Adequate nutrition can help the patient better cope with their illness.
- Unfortunately, nutrition is often overlooked in cancer care leaving patients, their families and carers without proper information on nutrition and unsure on what to ask their doctors in regards to their individual nutritional needs.

NUTRITION AND CANCER: COMMON SIDE EFFECTS

- Poor nutrition can often be a side effect of cancer treatment and recovery.
- Cancer treatment can change the way food tastes – often patients experience a metallic taste.
- Depending on the cancer, the patient may experience a change in the way their body absorbs nutrients.
- Feelings of nausea coupled with diarrhea and/or vomiting can dramatically change a patient's weight, leading to malnutrition.

NUTRITION AND CANCER: INDIVIDUAL NEEDS



- Nutritional intake varies from person to person and the patient's individual dietary needs to be taken into consideration, as well as:
- **The treatment the person is receiving** – different drugs can have different side effects such as nausea, diarrhea, pain, etc.
- **Any supplements the person is taking** – some vitamins and herbal supplements can interfere with a person's treatment.
- **Type of cancer** – some cancers such as head and neck can affect a person's ability to get the adequate amount of nutrients. This can lead to malnutrition and cachexia (cancer anorexia)
- **Other conditions the patient may have** – a person may be on a special diet due to another condition e.g heart condition

PERSONAL STORY HERE.

NUTRITION NEEDS: HEAD AND NECK CANCER

- Head and neck cancers are the 6th most common types of cancer in Europe with more than 150,000 new patients diagnosed every year. Yet, it is often diagnosed at a later stage.
- Head and neck patients are often at a higher risk of malnutrition due to the nature of the cancer. It can leave patients with difficulty in chewing/swallowing and other long-term effects.
- The matter has been addressed in the booklet *“Making Meals Make Sense: A cookbook and guide for people following head and neck cancer treatment”* created by survivors of Head and Neck cancer.

NUTRITION NEEDS - HEAD AND NECK CANCER

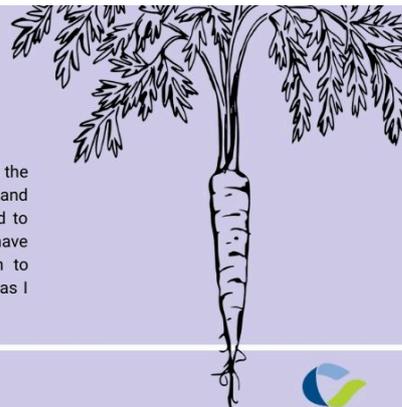
Robert Persio, Head and Neck survivor for ECPC's Make Sense campaign:

”

Head and Neck Cancer Patient Testimony:

Adapting to eating was a gradual process for me due to the impact of my treatment, as I experienced pain and sensitivity in my teeth, gums and tongue. While I used to find it embarrassing to eat in public, over time I have strengthened my jaw muscles, and as things began to return to normal I was able to start eating and talking as I had before.

Make Sense Campaign



NUTRITIONAL NEEDS: CHILDREN AND CANCER

- Children are also a high-risk category with the added need of nutrition to grow and maintain a healthy immune system.
- Depending on age it may be difficult for a child to express their needs.
- Following treatment, nutrition had to be closely monitored with school lunches, etc.

NUTRITION AND CANCER: WHAT TO ASK YOUR DOCTOR?

- Request regular nutritional screening, dietary counseling, and psycho-oncological support as part of your medical care.
- What is my current weight and is it important for me to maintain my weight during treatment?
- How can I improve my appetite and nutrition during treatment?
- What do you recommend I eat during treatment?
- Are there any foods I should avoid?
- What are my options if my normal daily nutritional intake is insufficient?
- Should I be taking vitamins or antioxidants during treatment?
- (All questions provided by ECPC's "Living well during cancer treatment" nutrition booklet)

NUTRITION AND CANCER: ACTIONS NEEDED

- It is important to remember as a patient appropriate nutritional care and information is your right during and after treatment.
- Patients should undergo regular nutritional screenings and counselling and be given the information they need to be more aware their own nutritional needs during and after treatment.
- Patients individual needs should be assessed and listened too and various cancer types should be taken into account.
- Patients should be involved in the development of clinicial guidelines and recognized as an important factor in their own care.

THANK YOU!