

What Is Cachexia?

Cachexia (kuh-KEK-see-uh) is a condition related to chronic diseases such as cancer. In patients with cancer, it is also called Cancer Cachexia Syndrome or wasting syndrome. It can lead to significant loss of body weight, including muscle mass and fat. This fact sheet will discuss:

- **How cachexia affects the body**
- **The difference between a loss of appetite and cachexia**
- **How the symptoms of cachexia can be treated**



Causes and Symptoms of Cachexia

Cachexia is caused by changes in the body's metabolism, which is how the body breaks food down into energy.

As a result of cachexia, the body no longer uses the proteins, fats and carbohydrates the way it did before. This can lead not only to the loss of body weight, but muscle strength and mass. Often, the changes can be dramatic.

Cachexia can be very common with advanced forms of cancer and with certain diagnoses, such as pancreatic or stomach cancer. It can lead to extreme fatigue. Ordinary activities like walking or taking a bath can become very difficult.



Cachexia and Loss of Appetite

Fatigue and loss of appetite are common with any cancer diagnosis and are not necessarily signs of cachexia. Treatment-related issues can impact the desire to eat. These can include mouth sores, trouble swallowing or nausea. Constipation or diarrhea from certain treatment or diagnoses can also affect appetite, as well as stress or depression.

Cachexia can be a consequence of the advanced cancer. This can impact the way the body uses nutrients, proteins and lipids. In various ways, the body's processes of turning food into fuel, or energy, have changed.

Sometimes, 'cachexia' is used to describe a potentially temporary loss of weight due to appetite issues, but is not the clinically the same.



Treating Cachexia

In its clinical definition, cachexia cannot currently be cured unless the cancer itself is able to be treated. This is not always possible in advanced stages of cancer.

In many cases, this means focusing on quality of life, slowing down the progress of the condition and making the patient as comfortable as possible.

A doctor may use certain methods to help with nausea, mood or improving appetite. These may include anti-inflammatory medication, nutritional supplements and changes to diet, as well as forms of exercise, depending on the patient's strength.

If a loved one has cachexia, they are likely to have advanced forms of cancer. At such a point, their comfort may need to become the central concern of treatment. It is important for their physician to have these conversations with them.



CancerCare® Can Help

For over 80 years, CancerCare has empowered millions of people affected by cancer through free counseling, support groups, educational resources, advocacy and financial assistance. Our oncology social workers improve the lives of people diagnosed with cancer, caregivers, survivors and the bereaved, by addressing their emotional, practical and financial challenges. To learn more, visit us at www.cancercare.org.

To learn more, visit www.cancercare.org or call **800-813-HOPE (4673)**.

Facebook: facebook.com/CancerCare | **Instagram:** [@CancerCareUS](https://www.instagram.com/CancerCareUS) | **Twitter:** [@CancerCare](https://twitter.com/CancerCare)

