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Food made for cancer patients

Line has extra nutrients, appeals to poor appetites

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Helene Gruber just wasn't hungry some days when she fought breast cancer a few years ago.

Other days, the Glendale woman didn't have the energy to put together a meal and eat it.

But Gruber, a registered dietitian and the director of nutrition services at St. Elizabeth Medical Center, knew she had to eat. About a third of

all cancer deaths are actually caused by malnutrition, not the cancer itself.

"You just feel so puny and punky and poisoned, and you really don't feel like eating or drinking anything," she said.

To give cancer patients and others battling critical illness an edge in recovery, Gruber teamed up with KHI Foods in Burlington to develop a line of prepared fortified soups, oatmeals, vitamin waters, cookies and breads.

The Comfort Care prod-

ucts are aimed at tempting patients' appetites while giving them extra protein, fiber, vitamins and crucial nutrients.

Gruber worked with clinical dietitians at the hospital to make sure the foods hit all the right notes nutritionally. The soups are all built around what she calls "a magic formula" of micronutrients and minerals shown to help cancer patients recover.

"There's so much research emerging on micronutrients and polyphenols and all the

good nutrients in brightly colored fruits and vegetables," Gruber said. "There's so much about nutrition that is still unfolding. That's the amazing part of it all."

Millard Long of KHI worked with chefs at the Midwest Culinary Institute to make sure they tasted good.

"Somebody who's sick isn't going to have the regular taste and appetite as the rest of us," Long said.

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KHI Foods in Burlington produces the line of packaged meals for weak cancer patients. Millard Long is president of the company.

Food: Line designed for poor appetites

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Chemotherapy and radiation alter a person's taste perceptions.

Foods that normally would taste sweet might taste bitter to a chemo patient, Gruber said.

Cancer treatments sometimes also suppress patients' appetites or cause nausea, she said.

"In the worst cases, we often see cancer patients returning to the hospital during, or following, treatment, due to inadequate nutrition or dehydration," Gruber said.

So coming up with something tasty and nutritious was crucial.

Every serving of the soup, which comes in several varieties, has 8 grams of protein and 5 grams of fiber. Long worked with Giminetti Baking in Walnut Hills to develop a whole wheat bread fortified with

protein and fiber.

The food just needs to be heated and eaten, making it easier to put together a comforting meal for patients and caregivers.

Customers can order packaged kits that include two to three days worth of products, plus utensils for \$119.

They can also order just the soups or a combination of the soups and breads for \$59.

Comfort Care foods use Kentucky Proud sustainable agricultural products, Long said, and packaging materials are all environmentally friendly. Products and kits are assembled by disabled adults who work at NorthKey Community Care in Carrollton.

The products can be bought at the hospitals in Edgewood and Covington, or online at www.comfort-care-products.com.



Soups are easy to heat and eat. The Comfort Care line includes chicken soup and tomato cheddar jack soup. All the items are designed to be nutritious and fortifying.