

Cancer Protective Diet: The New American Plate

Good nutrition plays a major role in preventing or reducing your risk of cancer. While there are some factors that you cannot change, such as genetics and the environment, there are many ways you can reduce your risk. These include eating a healthy diet, staying active, maintaining a healthy weight and avoiding smoking.



The truth is that your diet can promote cancer or protect you against cancer

Despite what many of us believe, we were not born to like or dislike certain foods, we were taught. Moreover, we can change our preferences and really learn to enjoy and actually prefer healthier foods!

It is also very important to share the diet recommendations to decrease cancer risk with your family as they may be at higher risk if they share the same diet or lifestyle with you. Some foods in particular are “cancer fighting foods” because they contain “phytochemicals”.

Phytochemicals are compounds produced by plants and believed to protect cells from damage that could lead to cancer. There are more than 4,000 phytochemicals found in fruits, vegetables, grains, beans and other plants. That is why we should eat a variety of foods from all the food groups!

Recommendations

1. Consume a diet high in a variety of fruits, vegetables, whole grains and beans.

- Try to eat **1 ½ -2 ½ cups veggies and 1-2 cups of fruit each day.** If you do not like vegetables, eat more fruit and vice versa.
- Focus on fruits and vegetables high in vitamin C, carotenoids and cruciferous vegetables, which contain compounds that lower inflammation, enhance your immune system and decrease your risk of developing cancer.

- **Carotenoids:** Apricots, asparagus, beef liver, beets, broccoli, cantaloupe, carrots, guava, kale, mangoes, mustard and collard greens, nectarines, peaches, pink grapefruit, pumpkin, squash (yellow and winter), sweet potatoes, tangerines, tomatoes and watermelon.
- **Cruciferous:** Broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, kale, bok choy, arugula, Brussels sprouts, collards, watercress and radishes
- **Vitamin C:** Orange juice, oranges, grapefruit and grapefruit juice, kiwi, green pepper, broccoli, strawberries, Brussels sprouts, cooked cabbage, cauliflower



- **Other great choices!** Apples, blueberries, butternut squash, corn, dark leafy greens, dried beans (pinto, navy, black, etc.), green peas, papaya, pineapple, prunes, raspberries, red peppers, raisins, spinach, turnip greens
- c. Wash or scrub your vegetables and fruits (both fresh and dried) to remove harmful pesticides. Remove outer leaves from lettuce and cabbage. Soak dried fruit such as raisins, prunes, cranberries and cherries in a solution of four parts water and 1-part vinegar, then rinse with cold water. Use a solution of 1 tsp baking soda per 2 cups warm water and soak fresh fruits such as apples, nectarines, peaches and pears for 12-15 minutes. Rinse.



2. Choose whole grain breads and cereals.

- a. Whole grain breads and cereal provide the fuel the body needs for energy as well as essential vitamins, minerals, fiber, and phytonutrients. Fiber has a protective factor against cancer, in particular colorectal cancer. Other benefits of fiber include better weight control, a healthier intestinal lining and a decrease in constipation-all of which decrease your risk of cancer.
- b. The best sources: 100% whole wheat breads, high fiber cereals, whole wheat pasta, shredded wheat, oatmeal, whole wheat crackers, rye bread, couscous, quinoa, barley, faro, and brown or wild rice.



3. Limit intake of “fast foods” and other processed foods high in fat and sugar.

Although these are fast and easy in a hectic lifestyle, many of these foods are unhealthy and contain very little nutrition. They are often highly processed and contain fillers, artificial colors, sodium, sugar, unhealthy fats and additives. If you do eat out, try to make the best choices.

4. Limit intake of all meats, in particular red and processed meats.

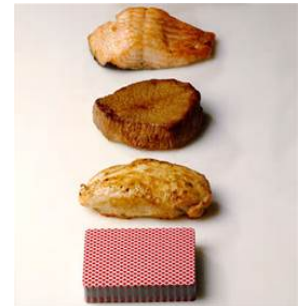
Americans are the highest consumers of meat in the world. Studies have shown a high intake of red and processed meats significantly increases risk of colorectal cancer. This risk is even greater for those who smoke.

- a. Increase your intake of chicken, turkey, fish, eggs, nuts, seeds, nut butters, beans, lentils, low-fat dairy and yogurt.
- b. Eat more plant-based sources of protein. You do not need to eat meat with every meal. Try beans with rice or cornbread, lentil burgers, quinoa with vegetables and spice, cereal with milk or yogurt, hummus with sliced vegetables, soups with beans and grains, peanut butter on wheat bread, stir-fry with whole-grain noodles, tofu, vegetables and nuts.
- c. Eat more fish! Fish is a great source of omega-3 fatty acids, which boosts your immune system, fights off and decreases the production of cancer cells. Eating fish high in Omega-3 appears linked to delaying or reducing tumor development in breast and prostate cancer as well as an improved breast cancer prognosis. Adults should eat at least 8 ounces or two 4 oz. servings of omega-3-rich fish a week.



- Fish highest in Omega 3 Fatty acids: Anchovies, mackerel, sable fish (black cod), whitefish, sardines, herring, rainbow trout, mussels, tuna, halibut, pollock, blue crab or Alaska king crab.

- Avoid these fish completely as they are high in mercury: King mackerel, marlin, orange roughy, shark, swordfish, tilefish, bigeye tuna, farm raised salmon
- d. Eat no more than moderate servings of red meat (12 – 18 ounces cooked red meat per week).
- e. Choose the leanest cuts of meat, trim off all excess fat and keep portion sizes at meals to 3-4 oz. or the size of a deck of cards or the palm of your hand. Load up the rest of your plate with vegetables, grains and fruits.
- f. Avoid smoked, processed, pickled and cured meats such as ham, bacon, hot dogs, deli meats, corned beef, pates, canned meats (vienna sausages, deviled ham), smoked salmon, dried fish and jerky. These foods contain “nitrates”, which have been linked to an increased risk of cancer, in particular cancer of the colon. Read the labels and avoid those that list “sodium nitrate” as part of the ingredients. Look for “nitrate free” products.
- g. Do not eat charred meats and avoid grilling meats at intense high temperatures as this produces cancer-causing chemicals. When fat drips into the grill, the resulting flames can cover food with these chemicals and the higher temperature and longer cook time increases the formation of these. Marinate, trim fat and pre-cook meats to decrease time on the grill. Cook meat on lower heat and flip more frequently to prevent less charring and flare-ups.
- h. The best way to cook your meats is by baking, broiling, grilling (no charring), poaching or stewing. Add seasonings to enhance the flavor.



5. Limit your intake of sugar sweetened beverages and desserts.

Desserts, candy, soft drinks, flavored juice drinks, sweet tea and flavored coffees are high in sugar and are sources of “empty” calories with little or no nutritional value. Keep portions small and limit how often you have them.

6. Try to drink at least 64 ounces of water per day.

If you do not like the taste of water, try adding a little frozen fruit, fruit juice, lemon or orange slices.

7. Limit alcohol consumption.

- a. The research is clear that all types of alcoholic drinks, including red and white wine, beer, cocktails, and liquor are linked with cancer. The American Institute for Cancer Research recommends **no alcohol intake for cancer prevention**.
- b. Alcohol increases your risk for at least six types of cancer: mouth and throat, larynx (voice box), esophagus, colorectal (colon and rectum), liver and breast.
- c. If alcohol is consumed, limit intake to no more than one drink per day for women and two drinks per day for men. One drink is considered a 5-ounce glass of wine, a 12-ounce beer or 1.5 ounces distilled spirits.

8. Use healthy fats!

- a. Fats and oils are made of fatty acids and serve as a rich source of energy for the body.
- b. The healthiest types of fats are found in these oils: olive, canola, peanut, sunflower, safflower, corn, soybean, walnut and flaxseed. Avocados, nuts, sunflower seeds, sesame seeds and pumpkin seeds are also good sources of fat.
- c. Remember that although these are healthy fats, they are also very high in calories, so limit how much you use.



9. Maintain a healthy weight.

- a. Being overweight or obese appears to be associated with 13 types of cancer: Meningioma, multiple myeloma, esophageal, thyroid, postmenopausal breast, gallbladder, stomach, liver, pancreas, kidney, ovaries, uterus and colorectal.
- b. Researchers do not fully understand how obesity increases cancer risk, but it may be due to increased insulin levels and inflammation in the bod. It is also possible that obesity creates an environment that promotes tumor cell growth and progression.
- c. For women, being overweight or obese after menopause increases the risk and recurrence of breast cancer along with uterine cancer. Having more fat after menopause, particularly in the waist can raise estrogen and insulin levels. One or both of these have been linked to breast, endometrial or ovarian cancer.
- d. If you are overweight, it is extremely important to evaluate your diet and looks for ways to decrease your calorie intake. Check with your doctor about a weight loss program or a referral to a registered dietitian. Sometimes small changes in your diet can result in weight loss and decreased risk of cancer.

10. Drinks lots of water!

Water and liquids or fluids are vital to health. Try to drink at least 64 ounces of **non-caffeinated liquid each day to be sure that your body cells get the fluid they need.** If you do not like the taste of water, try adding a little fruit juice, orange slices, frozen strawberries or lemon juice.



11. Increase your physical activity.

Research has shown that physical activity **is strongly associated** with a decrease in risk for the following cancers: multiple myeloma, head and neck cancer, rectal, bladder and lung. Exercise also decreases the risk of cancer of the colon, breast, endometrium, esophagus, liver, stomach, kidney, lung (in current and former smokers) as well as myeloid leukemia.

Other great benefits of exercise include reducing anxiety, depression and fatigue during and after treatment as well as promote a better quality of life and physical ability.

The American Cancer Society recommends 150 minutes of moderate intensity such as walking (20 minutes per mile) or 75 minutes of vigorous activity per week. That may sound like a lot, but walking on your lunch break 30 minutes/day five times per week will meet that goal. This exercise can be done in episodes of any length or combination. Start out slowly and increase the frequency and the length of time you exercise until you reach your goal.

12. Always ask your doctor before taking a vitamin, mineral or herbal supplement.

Generally, a “One-a-Day” type vitamin with no more than 100-150% of the Recommended Daily Allowances is safe. However, large doses of some of supplements may be dangerous, counteract the effectiveness of your treatment and some may even promote the growth of certain types of cancer.



Authored by a Community Cancer Center dietitian.