

The Role of Nutrition in Cancer Prevention

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Cancer has made an impact on nearly every family in the United States. Thirty to forty percent of cancers can be prevented by lifestyle and dietary measures alone (Donaldson, 2004). Limiting the intake of certain foods, such as concentrated sugar products, refined flour products, low-fiber foods, meat-based foods, and excessively fatty foods can decrease your cancer risk. Studies have shown that individuals whose diets are very low in vegetables, fruits, and whole grains, and high in processed and red meats, tend to have an increased risk of some of the most common types of cancers (Kushi, 2006).

Your Choices Matter

Dietary choices, maintaining consistent physical activity, and overall weight control are important factors in cancer prevention. One-third of the more than 500,000 cancer deaths in the United States are caused by excess weight and obesity due to a poor diet and lack of physical activity. A diet filled with plant-based foods and limited calorie-dense foods will reduce your caloric intake. Sometimes this can be difficult, but here are some helpful suggestions:

- Keep an eye on your portions. Make sure to read food labels and identify standard serving sizes.
- Limit your consumption of empty calories, including foods and beverages composed primarily of added sugars, fats or oils, and alcoholic beverages.
- Reduce your fried foods, soda, pastries, ice cream, and other sweets.
- Choose side dishes and desserts of fruits and vegetables instead of calorie-dense desserts

The benefits of fruits and vegetables:

Vegetables and fruits are extremely beneficial in the prevention of cancer. These foods contain important nutrients such as vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, fiber, carotenoids, and other compounds that remove toxins and protect against cellular damage. Greater consumption of fruits and vegetables is associated with decreased risk of lung, esophageal, stomach, and colorectal cancer. On average, adults should consume around 5 servings of fruits and vegetables every day.

The benefits of whole grains:

Whole grains, such as wheat, rice, oats, and barley are important for a healthy diet. Whole grain foods are lower in calories and have higher fiber, vitamins, and minerals than processed (refined) grain. Some of the vitamins and minerals found in whole grain products have been associated with lowering the risk of cancer.

Avoid processed and red meats:

Many studies have shown a significant correlation between the consumption of red and processed meats and increased cancer risk (Willet 2000). Here are some tips to reduce unhealthy meats:

- Choose lean meats (non-skinned chicken, seafood, or 70% lean pork) and use meat as a side dish rather than as the focus of a meal.
- Substitute plant-based proteins (peas, beans, lentils, soybeans, peanuts, etc.) or seafood (tilapia, salmon, shrimp, cod, etc.) as a protein source less healthy meat you consume.
- Grill, roast, or bake meats rather than frying.



FOOD FOR THOUGHT



Eat five or more servings of a variety of vegetables and fruits each day



Choose whole grains instead of processed (refined) grains



Limit consumption of processed and red meats



Drink eight cups of water a day



Limit your consumption of alcohol



Avoid consuming large amounts of foods preserved by salting and pickling

Sources

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