

Nutrition for Breast Cancer: Guidelines for Healthy Eating



Lara Istaitie
Clinical Dietitian -
Basile In/Surgical Unit
AUBMC

After a woman is diagnosed with breast cancer, she begins to examine her diet and lifestyle habits. She tends to question the cause of cancer and the lifestyle changes she should adopt. Thus, many women will adopt a strict diet hoping that this will prevent or cure cancer. Diet is responsible for about 30% to 40% of all cancers. However, abiding by a healthy diet alone is not enough.

Guidelines for Healthy Eating

There is no magic diet, food or supplement that will help prevent or cure cancer. However, several studies have shown that there are a set of guidelines that can help decrease the risk of cancer recurrence. National Cancer Institute guidelines for cancer prevention include:

- Increase consumption of fruits, vegetables and whole grains
- Decrease intake of fat and high fat foods
- Limit intake of processed, cured and smoked foods such as such as bacon, sausage, deli meats and hot dogs
- Maintain a healthy weight
- Consume moderate amount of alcohol

Fruits, Vegetables and Whole Grains

Fruits, vegetables and whole grains are rich in antioxidants that may prevent cancer. We recommend five or more servings of fruit and vegetables per day. One serving of



fruit is equivalent to the size of the palm of your hand and one serving of vegetables is equivalent to half a cup of cooked vegetables or 1 cup of raw vegetables. A diet rich in plant based food is considered healthier than a diet rich in animal products. It is important to vary your vegetables and fruits so that you can get all the nutrients your body needs.

Whole grains are unprocessed foods that are rich in complex carbohydrates, fiber, vitamins, minerals and phytochemicals. Whole grains include whole wheat bread/pasta, burghol, brown rice, oats, and quinoa.

Fat Intake Recommendations

Eating a low fat diet decreased breast cancer risk. Recommendations include:

- Limit the intake of foods high in saturated fats such as beef, organ meats, cheeses, cream, butter, ice cream. Opt for low fat or skimmed dairy products instead of full fat.
- Decrease intake of trans fatty acids, such as commercially prepared baked goods, crackers and margarine.
- Increase your intake of lean chicken, fish and plant based proteins such as legumes and lentils. Increase your intake of fish to 3 times per week. Fish is rich in omega-3-polyunsaturated fat intake which may inhibit the growth of tumors.
- Trim fat from meat, poultry, and fish.
- Remove the skin from poultry and fish.

Healthy Body Weight

Women who are overweight or obese are at a higher risk of being diagnosed with cancer. Women should follow a weight reducing diet and exercise to maintain a healthy body weight.

Alcohol Consumption

Increased alcohol consumption increases breast cancer risk. Dietary guidelines suggest that a woman consume no more than one drink per day. Women diagnosed with breast cancer should avoid alcohol.

Vitamin, mineral and herbal supplementation

Many women believe that vitamin, mineral or herbal supplementation help prevent or cure cancer. However, research does not support their use in lowering cancer risk especially that these dietary supplements are not regulated like other medicines and they don't have to be proven effective or safe before being sold.

Exercise

Exercise has been linked to:

- Fewer fatigue symptoms
- Improved mood
- Improved overall physical and emotional well-being.
- Reduced risk of recurrence

Aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate intensity activity each week such as walking, dancing, and bicycling. Always consult your physician for any physical activity program you plan to participate in.

MYTH: I should buy organic food to prevent cancer.

FACT: Organic foods are foods that have not been exposed to pesticides and hormones. Eating organic food is a good idea to limit your exposure to these substances. However, there is no scientific evidence that the consumption of non-organic foods increases the risk of breast cancer.

MYTH: I should avoid eating sugar since cancer feeds on sugar.

FACT: Cancer doesn't feed on sugar. All our body organs (heart, kidney, etc.) rely on sugar as a source of energy. However, consuming excess added sugar leads to obesity, which is a risk factor for cancer.

