

Cancer and Diet Theories

This handout will help you find information you can trust about cancer and diet.

Introduction

- The facts about diets and cancer can be confusing.
- You may have heard that sugar feeds cancer. Or that you should avoid certain foods to prevent cancer or slow cancer growth. At present, there is no evidence to support this. Eating or avoiding one food or nutrient does not impact cancer growth.
- Ask your treating team about things you may have heard or are thinking of trying.

Useful websites to help you work out fact from theory

- Cancer Council iHeard – cancer myths and facts.
“Heard something about cancer and not sure if it’s true or just a myth? Get the facts.”
www.cancer.org.au/iheard
- About Herbs, Botanicals & Other Products
www.mskcc.org/cancer-care/diagnosis-treatment/symptom-management/integrative-medicine/herbs
“This tool can help you figure out the value of using common herbs and other dietary supplements.”
- Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre - The CanEAT Pathway
www.petermac.org/CanEATpathway
This pathway helps people with cancer and their carers. It supports eating and drinking well during cancer treatment. It will provide and link you with reliable information, resources and tools. It also provides some practical tips that will help you along the way.
- World Cancer Research Fund – Diet, Nutrition, Physical Activity and Cancer: a Global Perspective. The Third Expert Report.
www.dietandcancerreport.org
An up to date summary of scientific research on cancer, diet, nutrition and activity.

Recommendations before and during treatment

- There are no foods to prevent or slow cancer growth. But research tells us that eating enough to keep your healthy cells working is important. This can improve physical function, quality of life, fatigue and reduce treatment complications.
- You can use your weight as a rough guide of if you're eating enough. If you are losing weight without trying, this may be a sign that you're not eating enough.
- Choose a balanced eating pattern that includes a wide variety of foods if you can.
- Avoid drastic diet restrictions. No single food will improve response to treatment. Rather, we know that eating enough food during treatment is important.
- If you have symptoms that stop you from eating enough, talk to your dietitian or treating team. They may recommend a high protein, high energy eating pattern.
- You may already follow a specific eating pattern before starting treatment. An example is vegetarian. If you want to continue eating this way during treatment, talk to your dietitian. They will check that you are getting enough nutrition.

How can you reduce your cancer risk after treatment?

- Carbohydrate foods are part of a balanced eating pattern. Carbohydrates include:
 - wholegrain or high fibre cereal foods
 - fruits
 - starchy vegetables (example potato, corn, legumes/beans)
 - milk and yoghurt.

They provide essential nutrients for our body. Some may reduce the risk of some cancers. Choose wholegrain or high fibre options where possible.

- Limit 'refined carbohydrates' when you have finished treatment and your weight is stable. Examples are soft drinks, lollies, chocolates, cordial and fruit juices. These foods have low amounts of important nutrients. They may also provide excessive energy and lead to weight gain.
- Being overweight or obese is a risk factor for developing some cancers. Reduce your risk of cancer and other conditions by maintaining a healthy weight. Maintaining a healthy weight is recommended to reduce cancer risk and other health conditions. Talk with your doctor or dietitian about the best time to start your

weight loss journey. Choose a balanced eating pattern and exercise most or all days to help reach a healthy weight.

Take Home messages

- Talk to your team and do your research on cancer and diet theories
 - Avoid drastic diet restrictions
 - No single food will prevent cancer or improve response to treatment.
 - Eating enough to keep your healthy cells working is important.
 - Choose an eating pattern that is healthy and balanced when are well enough to do so.
- It is important that you are eating enough before, during and after cancer treatment. This will help maintain your weight, strength and energy.