

# NUTRITION NEWS

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## Cancer Prevention

April is typically the month when we discuss cancer and the vital role that nutrition can play in the development of this disease. This is an area of study that is evolving constantly. We know that nutrition can play a role in the development of certain cancers; it is not easy to pinpoint, however, which exact macronutrient may play a role in developing which cancers. Here are some of the connections that are largely proven:

- \* Fruits and vegetables probably protect against many different cancers, including mouth cancer, pharynx, larynx, and esophageal cancers, stomach cancer, lung cancer, pancreatic cancer, and prostate cancer. How much protection fruits and vegetables offer and the mechanism by which they offer protective benefits is still being determined.
- \* Fiber offers a protective benefit against colorectal cancer. Fiber adds bulk to the stool and helps food move more quickly through the digestive tract. Because of this, foods containing fiber, such as whole-grain breads and pastas, oats, legumes, vegetables,

and fruits are linked to a reduced risk of cancer.

- \* Other groups of foods, including protein sources such as meats and dairy products, are less definite. Consuming excess amounts of processed foods (such as bacon and hot dogs) may increase your risk of developing cancer. Consuming excessive amounts of red meat (especially red meat that is higher in fat) may also be linked to an increased risk of cancer. Dairy products, on the other hand, may protect against bladder cancer and prostate cancer. As always, moderation remains key.
- \* Lastly, alcohol (especially excessive intake) is clearly linked to the development of many different types of cancer.

According to the American Cancer Society, approximately one in every twenty people will be diagnosed with colorectal cancer in their lifetime. Colorectal cancer is the third leading

APRIL 2024

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### MONTHLY EXERCISE

#### MARCHING (CHAIR AEROBICS)

Sit in chair back straight arm straight down

Begin by marching with alternative legs. Bring one thigh high then to starting position, then do same with other leg

Continue for 30 seconds or 20 marches.

cause of death in the US. With such a high incidence of colorectal cancer, it is important to be aware of what it is and what you can do to decrease your risk.

The development of colorectal cancer is a slow process, which can take between ten and twenty years. Since this cancer progresses so slowly, it can be detected early on if proper screening is completed as recommended by your physician. The following symptoms can be signs of colorectal cancer, so see your doctor if you experience any of these: dark or tarry stools, blood in stool, urge to have a bowel movement when the bowel is empty, change in stool shape that is more narrow than usual, or an unplanned weight loss without change of eating habits.

The occurrence of colorectal cancer increases with age and screening becomes even more important in the later stages of life. For early detection of colorectal cancers, talk to your physician about the best screening for you and how often you should be screened. Common tests include the colonoscopy, where a physician will use the scope or camera to view the colon and rectum while the patient is under anesthesia. The physician will be looking for polyps that can develop into cancer, and they may remove them during the procedure.

Diet, physical activity, smoking, being overweight or obese, and family history all factor into your risk for development of colorectal cancers. The good news is that many of these risk factors can be managed with a healthy diet, adequate physical activity, and abstaining from smoking. Diets high in fiber containing whole grains, fruits, and vegetables, but low in red meats and saturated fat help decrease the risk of certain cancers. To manage a healthy weight, limit your consumption of sugary drinks and processed foods that are high in fat and sugar yet low in fiber.

Physical activity is especially important when it comes to colorectal cancer prevention, with a 25% reduced risk of this cancer reported in physically active individuals in recent studies. Make a goal of at least 30 minutes of physical activity daily. Physical activity is anything that gets your heart rate above normal. Smoking increases the risk for many cancers including colorectal cancers. If you or someone you love is looking for help to quit smoking, call the New York State Smokers' Quit Line at 1-866-NYQUITS (1-866-697-8487).

In high risk individuals, there are some medications that have been found to reduce the risk of precancerous polyps or colon cancer. Some evidence links a reduced risk of polyps and colon cancer to regulate use of aspirin or aspirin-like drugs. It's not yet clear what dose and what length of time would be needed to reduce the risk of colon cancer. Taking aspirin daily also has some inherent risks, including gastrointestinal bleeding and ulcers. Therefore, these options are generally reserved for people with a high risk of colon cancer.

We have talked in the past about the role antioxidants may play in the prevention of cancer. Antioxidants work in the body by defending against dangerous substances known as free radicals.

Foods rich in antioxidants include fruits, vegetables, and certain types of tea. Specifically, berries are loaded with antioxidants. Blackberries, blueberries, strawberries, cranberries, and acai berries are all rich sources. Even though summer seems like a long way off, most supermarkets have a good selection of frozen berries. There are great to use for sprinkling on hot or cold cereals, baking muffins, or making smoothies.

Keep in mind bright colors when thinking about antioxidants. Deep red, oranges, and yel-

lows are usually high in antioxidants. This can include carrots, peppers, tomatoes, and oranges.

One superfood that is getting a lot of press recently is the elderberry. Elderberry is a dark purple berry that has been used for centuries in folk medicine to fight infection and boost immunity. Elderberries need to be cooked before they are consumed as they contain a toxin when raw (sambunigrin). Raw elderberries can cause nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and in large quantities, serious illness.

According to the Mayo Clinic, antioxidants help with more than just cancer prevention. Free radicals may also play a role in the development of cardiovascular disease, Alzheimer's Disease, Parkinson's Disease, and some eye afflictions. The Mayo Clinic details the following groups as being rich in antioxidants.

- **Berries:** colorful berries, particularly blueberries and strawberries, appear to have healthy heart effects. Research suggests that they may lower blood pressure and positively influence blood vessel health.
- **Curcumin:** curcumin is found in the spice turmeric, the main spice used to prepare curry. Curcumin is thought to have antioxidant properties, as it may decrease swelling and inflammation. Preliminary research suggests that curcumin may prevent cancer and possibly slow the spread of cancer.
- **Cruciferous vegetables:** this family includes broccoli, cauliflower, Swiss chard, Brussels sprouts, kale, and turnips. Research suggests these foods have a protective effect in preventing prostate, colorectal, and lung cancers.
- **Corn:** corn often gets a bad rap as a starchy vegetable that isn't good for diabetics. But yellow corn, and even cornmeal, contain substances known for strong antioxidant and anti-inflammation activities.

Foods, rather than supplements, are the safest way to increase antioxidant levels. Some high-dose antioxidant supplements, including beta carotene, Vitamin A, and Vitamin E, have been associated with health risks including an increased risk of overall mortality. No concerns have been raised about the safety of antioxidants consumed in foods.



