

Nutrition Recommendations During and After Cancer Treatment

Below are some nutritional tips to help promote optimal health and wellness during and after treatment. These recommendations may be modified to handle nutrition-related side effects, reduce symptoms and manage weight. For additional guidance, particularly if you are experiencing side effects or unexplained weight changes, please consult with a registered dietitian.

Follow a Plant-Based Diet

It is recommended you follow a plant-based diet. This means the majority (at least two-thirds) of your meal should consist of vegetables, fruits, whole grains and beans. Some examples include:

- Fruit mixed with whole grain breakfast cereal.
- Large green salad topped with a variety of fresh vegetables.
- Whole grain pasta topped with tomato and mushroom sauce.

Include a wide variety of fruits and vegetables, choosing from all colors of the rainbow. Frozen fruits and vegetables are a great option as well as canned items in their own juices instead of syrup.

Legumes such as beans, peas, lentils and soy beans are a good protein source and can be used in place of meat in soups and casseroles or on top of salads.

Sources of whole grains include 100 percent whole wheat bread, corn or whole wheat tortillas, bran cereals, brown or wild rice, whole wheat pasta, oatmeal, barley, amaranth, millet, buckwheat and quinoa.

Vegetable sticks or fruit make a perfect snack. Likewise, roasted nuts and seeds in golf-ball sized portions are a good snack or condiment when sprinkled on cereal, salads or roasted vegetables.

Limit Animal Protein

If you add animal protein to your diet, choose fish, chicken or turkey and limit the amount to one third of your plate. Also, try to eat less than 18 ounces of red meat (beef, pork or lamb) per week.

Animal proteins should be baked, broiled or poached instead of fried, charbroiled or chargrilled. In addition, avoid processed meats like hot dogs, deli meats, sausage and bacon. If consuming processed meats, choose nitrate-free versions.

Minimize High-Calorie, High-Salt and Low-Nutrient Foods

As part of a healthy diet, you should limit salty snacks like chips, fast food, processed foods such as frozen meals, canned soups and pizza and sweeteners such as sugar, honey and agave nectar. Also avoid foods high in sugar and artificial ingredients such as sodas, fruit flavored, sport and energy drinks, flavored milk, candy and processed desserts.

When eating something sweet, keep portions small and try to make it yourself using whole grain flour, less sugar and oil substitutes like apple sauce or low-fat yogurt.

Limit Alcohol Intake

The American Institute for Cancer Research currently recommends not drinking alcohol. If you do drink alcohol, limit your intake to two drinks per day for men and one drink per day for women. One drink is the equivalent of 12 ounces of beer, five ounces of wine or one and a half ounces of liquor. Ask your doctor and/or pharmacist if alcohol will interfere with treatments or medications.

Choose Fats Wisely

Choose foods rich in unsaturated and omega-3 fats including olive oil, canola oil, olives, walnuts, macadamia nuts, pecans, flax seeds and avocado. Cold water, wild-caught fish such as salmon, herring, sardines, trout, mackerel, halibut and tuna eaten two or three times a week are also good sources of omega-3 fats. Also consume low-fat or fat-free milk, cheese and ice cream.

Drink Plenty of Fluids

It is recommended you drink approximately eight to 12 cups of fluid per day. Water is the best option. Age, weight and physical activity, as well as some forms of cancer treatment and side effects, will affect individual fluid needs. Your health care team may adjust your fluid level as needed.

For More Information

If you have questions about your nutrition needs, ask your health care provider to schedule an appointment with a dietitian. You may also find answers by visiting the American Institute for Cancer Research at www.aicr.org and the American Cancer Society at www.cancer.org.