

[A Healthy Diet](#)

The Best Medicine for Cancer Prevention

By Teresa Sievers, MD, Internal Medicine and Anti-Aging, Regenerative and Functional Medicine. Edited by Annie Lisa

I am often asked by my patients if food can really make a difference in the fight against cancer. The answer is a resounding YES! Proper nutrition provides, what I like to call “the survivor’s edge.” And with cancer being the second leading cause of death in United States it’s important to focus our attention on the many ways we can prepare our bodies to not only fight this deadly disease, but maintain body strength in the unfortunate event that cancer treatment is required.

Making healthy food choices can both help the body maintain an environment that inhibits cancer cell growth and sustains muscle integrity, which is critical during cancer treatments. When it comes to cancer prevention or survival, the importance of establishing and maintaining an optimal diet cannot be overstated. Until recently, most cancer research had focused on cancer cells, rather than the environment of the body, which has the potential to prevent cancer cell growth. Failing to recognize the impact of diet in this type of environment is a significant reason we see diminished efforts in the fight against cancer.

A look at the typical American diet reveals excess animal proteins and heavily processed foods that contain chemicals from pesticides and dyes, all of which have potential to cause cancer. This type of diet, high in Omega 6 and low in Omega 3, (both essential fatty acids), can put the body in an inflammatory state when they are not balanced. The American diet also lacks abundant fresh fruits and vegetables that contain rich antioxidants and other nutrients.

Lastly, the diet is very high in sugar and ‘high glycemic foods which raise insulin. These are some examples of how the American diet can promote the growth of cancer cells as well as other ‘dis-ease’ states. To help patients gain a full understanding and reap the benefits from a healthy diet, I often refer my cancer patients to Karen Callan, CHC, AADP, a Certified Health Coach and member of the American Academy of Drugless Practitioners. Karen’s expertise and knowledge of the connection between certain di-seases, such as cancer and diet, enable her to educate patients on pro

per foods that can optimize the environment necessary for battling cancer. Studies show that low glycemic and anti-inflammatory diets stabilize blood sugars and inhibit the growth of cancer cells. Vegetarian or at least plant based diets have shown lower incidences of certain cancers. Cancer patients are often told to eat whatever they want, in order to gain weight, causing blood sugars to rise with insulin following. This, however, contributes to cancer cell growth. Callan, on the other hand, encourages clients to avoid pro-inflammatory foods like refined flours and sugars, fast food, sugary drinks and excessive animal protein.

This recommendation becomes even greater when people are being treated for cancer. Callan sees part of the problem is that “no one wants to feel like they are going on a diet or that they have to restrict what they eat because they are ill.” Instead, she provides her clients with delicious recipes that not only taste great, but are nutrient-rich so they feel satisfied not deprived. Both myself and Callan use high quality medical foods including vegetarian protein shakes with amino acids, vitamins, minerals and detoxifying nutrients. We also recommend high quality, filler free supplements that are rigorously tested for content and containments.

Along with keeping the body at a healthy state to prevent cancer growth, this nutrient rich diet also helps maintain muscle mass which is critical for sustaining cancer treatments. Patients need to be strong enough to receive uninterrupted chemotherapy to prevent cancer cells from becoming drug resistant. Fifty percent of people with cancer die from the malnutrition associated with the treatments.

It is so important to start practicing healthy eating now, before you get cancer. As Hippocrates said, “Let food be thy medicine and medicine be thy food.” To say that diet has nothing to do with cancer prevention and progression is to ignore the entire biochemistry of the human body and the way it functions. Health is 95% what a person does and 5% genetics. Nutrition is the foundation of everything I do. For this reason I find working with a health coach well versed in nutrition is a vital resource to offer patients. The goal is to empower the patient so they can make positive decisions about their health. Being healthy is a choice. Getting a patient there is our passion.

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