DIET

Don't Feed Your Cancer

Nutritionists recommend a diet rich in produce to reduce cancer risk

by Abbey N. Folsom
Nutritionist

We need to change the way we think about cancer. Cancer is a metabolic disease influenced internally and externally by what we eat and by environmental exposure to carcinogens. The foods we do and do not eat have a direct influence over cancer development.

We cannot always control environmental exposure to cancer-causing toxins. Socioeconomic resources, or lack thereof, often drive exposure to environmental or occupational hazards. Food security and access to quality nutrition influence chronic metabolic diseases, including obesity, metabolic syndrome, heart disease, diabetes and alcoholism, that are risk factors for cancer. Unfortunately, these risks disproportionally affect people living in poverty.

According to the **Florida Statewide Cancer Registry,** 115,000 people in this state receive cancer diagnoses every year. Nutrition strategies to prevent and manage gastrointestinal and metabolic diseases can reduce our chances of developing cancer.

CANCER METABOLISM

The body prioritizes the metabolism of cancer cells and tumors. Cancer metabolism is characterized by rapid consumption and fermentation of glucose (sugar), known as the Warburg effect. Cancer cells are a normal part of our metabolism, but most of us have effective immune responses, including dedicated cells tasked with degrading cancer cells.

When these internal stop-mechanisms fail, cancer cells may spread throughout the body and become tumors. Genetics helps us understand how cancer becomes metastatic; the mother-cancer is the oncogene (cancer gene) that dictates cancer metabolism throughout the body.

TREATMENT

Radiation destroys cancer cells, but also an array of nearby cells. Proton therapy is a selective proton beam. Chemotherapy drugs target specific phases of glycolysis – the breakdown of sugar. If chemotherapeutics do not kill the mother-cancer, it will come back. Chemotherapy not only kills cancer cells, but also kills cells that line the gastrointestinal tract, rendering food unpalatable and complicating digestion.

DIET

The American Cancer Society recommends a plant-based diet with limited consumption of processed and fatty meats like beef and pork. In a diet lacking sufficient plant nutrients and fiber, undigested red meat can putrefy in the colon and form polyps, which in turn can develop into cancer.

It's a good idea to eat plenty of fiber from actual fruits and vegetables, because these also contain a variety of nutrients that prevent and combat cancer. Juicing is not recommended during chemotherapy, because cancer patients might find raw foods difficult to digest while undergoing treatment.

Fortunately, smart dietary choices can help you avoid metabolic diseases and the subsequent risk of developing cancer. A high vitamin D status is associated with a reduced cancer risk.

To summarize, the consensus among nutritionists is to eat more plant-based fiber and lean meats, and avoid sugar. Frequent consumption of refined or simple carbohydrates has a direct course to high blood sugar and cholesterol levels. Balance your metabolism to enhance your ability to combat carcinogens and degrade cancer cells.

Abbey N. Folsom, M.S., is a Certified Nutrition Specialist, Florida-licensed dietitian/nutritionist and freelance writer. QC

A Ketogenic Diet

Note: The ketogenic diet is controversial among oncologists and cancer researchers. Always seek the advice of your physician and other qualified health care providers before starting a new diet or health program. This is not an either/or decision; it's about optimizing the outcome.

The goal of the ketogenic diet is to limit simple carbohydrates, such as sugar and refined flour, so the body produces an alternative source of energy, called ketones. The theory is that you starve the cancer cells of their direct food supply – sugar.

A ketogenic diet tailored for cancer patients differs from the disease state known as ketoacidosis – and from dramatic fad diets you may have heard about. The ketogenic diet produces a significantly lower concentration of ketones than seen in the disease state. The foods one can eat on a ketogenic diet include produce, lean meats and healthful fats, which are believed to enhance chemotherapy.