

# Eating Well During Cancer Treatment



PIHHealth.org



## General Well-Balanced Diet

Healthy eating habits and good nutrition throughout cancer treatment is essential. Cancer treatments work better when the patient is well nourished and consume adequate calories and protein from foods. Staying hydrated and maintaining muscle tissue with enough fluids, calories and nutrients can reduce treatment delays, boost your immune system and help minimize debilitating side effects such as fatigue. According to cancer.gov, patients who are well nourished may have a better chance of recovery and quality of life.

A general healthy diet promotes whole foods including vegetables, fruits, whole grains, low-fat dairy products, lean meats, seafood, reduced sodium intake, moderate fat intake, avoiding saturated and trans fats and limiting added sugars according to choosemyplate.gov.

## Special Considerations

### Supplements

According to the American Cancer Society, studies have not found that supplements containing certain nutrients (like vitamins), reduce cancer risk. Some supplements (including herbs) have even been suggested to cause harm. Whole foods are preferred over supplements, ensuring that a wide variety of nutrients are obtained for a well-balanced diet. Research suggests that the synergy between nutrients found naturally in foods offer a protective effect. It is important to know that herbal supplements are not approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Talk to your doctor before taking any herbal supplements while receiving cancer treatment. Supplements such as Ensure, Boost or Glucerna may be good options. If you are concerned with nutrient deficiencies, contact your doctor.

### Folate and Folic Acid

Folate may be restricted with some cancer treatments to prevent worsening of specific side effects. Since 1998, enriched grain products in the United States have been fortified with folic acid to ensure people get enough folate in their diet. To avoid excess folate, limit beans to one serving per day and avoid cereals, grains or bakery products that have added (enriched) folic acid. Whole grain products are typically not enriched (steel cut oats, barley, granola, brown rice).

## Protein

- Choose lean sources such as fish, poultry and beans
- When having beef or pork, choose leaner cuts and monitor portions
- Bake, broil or poach your meat; do not fry or charbroil
- Aim for 25g of protein per meal

## Fruits and Vegetables

- Aim for 2½ cups per day of whole fruits and vegetables
- Thoroughly wash all fruit and vegetables
- Eat a variety of colors to maximize nutritional content

## Grains

- Choose whole-grain breads, pasta and cereals. Look for whole wheat as the first ingredient on the label
- Choose unprocessed grains, for example, brown rice instead of white rice
- Limit sugar-added foods such as pastries, sugar-sweetened cereals and candy

## Special Considerations, continued

### Soy Products

With some cancers, patients may be encouraged to limit soy in the diet and to avoid soy supplements or concentrates. This is because some cancer cells are sensitive to a hormone called estrogen. Soy contains several phytochemicals (phytoestrogens) which have estrogen-like activity. However, the majority of soy products have been processed and very little of the “phyto-estrogens” remain in the food. Moderate consumption of soy foods appears safe for cancer patients. According to Cancer.org, it is prudent to avoid high doses of isolated soy compounds found specifically in supplements, as less is known about their health effects.

### Sugar

Sugar does not directly cause and/or “feed” cancer. Sugar increases calorie intake without providing any of the nutrients that reduce cancer risk. For a healthy diet, sugar-added foods should be enjoyed in moderation.

### Alcoholic Beverages

Drinking alcoholic beverages should be kept to a minimum or avoided completely during treatment to prevent interactions

with the drugs used to treat cancer. It is recommended that you do not drink alcohol on days that you receive chemotherapy, as it may interact with some of your medications. Generally, having an occasional glass of wine or beer is not going to affect you while on chemotherapy. You should discuss this with your doctor first to make sure it is all right.

## Food Safety (fda.org)

When certain disease-causing bacteria, viruses or parasites contaminate food, they can cause foodborne illness. Because individuals with cancer have weakened immune systems, they are more likely to contract a foodborne illness. Good technique when handling and preparing foods can help reduce the risk of foodborne illness.

The most susceptible foods to disease-causing bacteria are:

- Uncooked or unwashed fresh fruits and vegetables
- Some animal products, such as: unpasteurized (raw) milk; soft cheeses made with raw milk; raw or undercooked eggs, raw meat, raw poultry, raw fish, raw shellfish and their juices; and luncheon meats and deli-type salads.

## Four Basic Steps to Food Safety

# 1

### Clean: Wash hands and surfaces often

- Wash hands in warm soapy water for at least 20 seconds before and after handling food
- Wash cutting boards, dishes, utensils and counter tops with hot soapy water between the preparation of raw meat, poultry and seafood products and preparation of any other food that will not be cooked
- Use paper towels to clean up kitchen surfaces. If using cloth towels, you should wash them often in the hot cycle of the washing machine
- Wash produce. Rinse fruits and vegetables, and rub firm-skin fruits and vegetables under running tap water, including those with skins and rinds that are not eaten. A dilute solution of dish soap can be used for washing produce. After washing foods, rinse well
- Clean the lids on canned foods before opening

# 2

### Separate: Don't cross-contaminate

- Separate raw meat, poultry, seafood and eggs from other food in your grocery shopping cart, grocery bags and in your refrigerator

# 3

### Cook: Cook to safe temperatures

- Consider using one cutting board only for raw foods and another only for ready-to-eat foods, such as bread, fresh fruits and vegetables, and cooked meat

#### USDA-FDA Recommended Safe Minimum Internal Temperatures

Beef, Pork, Veal, Lamb, Steaks, Roasts & Chops	145 °F with 3-minute rest time
Fish	145 °F
Beef, Pork, Veal, Lamb (ground)	160 °F
Turkey, Chicken and Duck (whole, pieces and ground)	165 °F

# 4

### Chill: Refrigerate promptly

- Refrigerate or freeze meat, poultry, eggs, seafood and other perishables within two hours of cooking or purchasing. Refrigerate within one hour if the temperature outside is above 90 °F
- Never thaw food at room temperature, such as on the counter top. It is safe to thaw food in the refrigerator, in cold water or in the microwave. If you thaw food in cold water or in the microwave, you should cook it immediately.

## When To Contact Your Doctor or Health Care Provider:

- Fever of 100.4° F (38° C) or higher, chills (possible signs of infection)
  - Nausea (that interferes with your ability to eat and that is unrelieved with prescribed medication)
  - Vomiting (vomiting more than 4-5 times in a 24-hour period)
  - Diarrhea (4-6 episodes in a 24-hour period)
  - Extreme fatigue (unable to carry on self-care activities)
  - Mouth sores (painful redness, swelling or ulcers)
- Always inform your health care provider if you experience any unusual symptoms. **For more information about nutrition services or to schedule an appointment, call 562.698.0811 Ext. 11320.**

