Breast cancer prevention and nutrition [1]

Dear Alice,

What types of foods should I eat to prevent breast cancer?

? Concerned about breast cancer

Answer

Dear Concerned about breast cancer,

Evidence suggests there may be a relationship between the food we eat and the risk for developing cancer. However, research is still inconclusive, and diet is only one of the numerous factors that may play a part in cancer development. Although no diet will guarantee total protection against cancer, it is one factor for which you have control.

So, what should you eat? The American Cancer Society [2] recommends the following dietary guidelines for decreasing the risk for all types of cancer:

- Fruits and veggies. At least five cups per day will increase antioxidant consumption, which has been shown to decrease general cancer risk. Vividly colored fruits and vegetables like red peppers, purple cabbage, and blueberries are particularly high in antioxidants.
- High-fiber cruciferous vegetables, such as broccoli, kale, cauliflower, and cabbage contain compounds called glucosinolates that are being studied for their potentially anti-cancerous properties.
- High-protein dairy products. By getting enough protein, you will feel fuller for a longer period of time, which will help you resist temptation to eat junk foods. Low fat yogurt and cottage cheese are great sources.
- Omega-3 fatty acids. Contained in olive oil, nuts, and avocados, omega-3 fatty acids (when consumed in moderation) also help you feel full and satisfied without promoting weight gain.

What should you avoid eating?

- Saturated fat. Try keeping saturated fat below 20 percent of your daily caloric intake; many breast cancer studies demonstrate a relationship between high fat diets and breast cancer development.
- Carcinogen-laden smoked and charred foods, especially red meats.
• Alcohol. Consumption of alcohol has been linked specifically with breast cancer development. Risk increases up to seven percent for each ten grams of alcohol consumed daily. Opt for non-alcoholic beverages instead.

It is generally a good idea to eat a plant-based diet high in fiber, vitamins, and minerals to help decrease the risk for developing all kinds of cancers. Certain fruits and vegetables [3] high in phytochemicals, antioxidants, and other nutrients help your body fight disease. Eating foods that are naturally low in fat, cholesterol, salt, and sugar can also help reduce the risk of developing heart disease, strokes, diabetes, and obesity, and they can also alleviate constipation.

One of the most effective ways to lower your risk for breast cancer is to maintain a healthy weight through balanced diet and moderate exercise. In fact, results from a study on breastcancer.org [4] showed that overweight women with high fat diets showed higher levels of breast cancer recurrence than those who maintained a well-balanced diet.

One final note? make an effort to get your vitamins and minerals from food rather than dietary supplements. Some scientists believe it is the interaction of nutrients along with many substances in food (not in pills) that are the protective factors against cancer. There is still much to be learned about breast cancer prevention. If you have any further questions, consider making an appointment with a health care provider.

Alice!
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