



Cancer & Nutrition

Cancer begins when cells in the body become abnormal. As these cells duplicate, a mass of tissue made of abnormal cells forms and is called a tumor. Normal cells grow and divide and know to stop growing. Over time, they also die. Unlike these normal cells, cancer cells continue to multiply and do not die when they are supposed to. If the tumor gets bigger, it can damage nearby tissues and organs. Cancer cells can also break away and spread to other parts of the body.

Nutrition is important for both cancer prevention and treatment. If diagnosed with cancer, there are numerous treatments that can be utilized, all of which can cause side effects capable of affecting nutrition. Some effects of cancer treatments include:

- **Fatigue:** Get plenty of rest, and if unable to eat large amounts, choose calorie-dense foods (e.g., butter, cheese, ice cream, and milkshakes)
- **Nausea and vomiting:** Avoid excessive exposure to the smell of food, and take medications with food if able
- **Taste changes:** Stay well hydrated (this can be linked to dry mouth) and eat citrus foods to stimulate saliva production
- **Dry mouth or thick saliva:** Stay well hydrated and try sucking on ice chips
- **Sore mouth or sore throat:** Pick soft, easy-to-chew foods; add gravy and sauce to food
- **Diarrhea:** Drink plenty of fluids, choose low-fiber foods, and avoid irritating foods (e.g., dairy, sugar, and spicy foods)
- **Constipation:** Eat fiber-rich foods and stay well hydrated
- **Loss of appetite and weight loss:** Choose calorie-dense foods (e.g., butter, cheese, ice cream, and milkshakes)

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There are also unique side effects that can vary depending on the location of the cancer. For example:

- Head and neck cancer may lead to chewing difficulties
- Colon cancer may be associated with more gastrointestinal-related side effects (e.g., diarrhea)
- Lung cancer may lead to an increase in shortness of breath, which can make eating more difficult

Nutrition is also important for cancer survivors, as well as those looking to prevent cancer. The following guidelines can help minimize the risk for cancer:



- Eat plant-based foods (e.g., fruits, vegetables, and whole grains).
- Be physically active for at least 30 minutes a day.
- Avoid sugary drinks and excessive energy-dense foods (e.g., chips, cookies, and candy).
- Limit consumption of red meats (e.g., beef, pork, and lamb)
- Limit consumption of processed meats (e.g., bacon, sausage, and salami)
- If consuming alcohol, keep it to 2 drinks/day for men and 1 for woman
- Avoid excessive salt consumption

Check with a dietitian or doctor for your specific dietary needs.

Additional Notes: