

## Preparing for Battle with Cancer

Nutritionally there is a common goal regardless of type or stage of cancer: to ready the body for battle—physically, emotionally, and nutritionally (biochemically).

According to the American Cancer Society cancer rates have more than tripled in the last 100 years, and with more than 1.5 million diagnosed last year with some type of cancer, it is arguable that we should all be abiding by the guidelines below in an effort to be prepared should we become one of the 1.5 million who face a diagnosis.

The most important guideline in cancer nutrition is ensuring that the person is maintaining plenty of calories. Just like an athlete training for the Olympics, a person heading into a battle with cancer will expend more caloric energy than before. This energy requirement is especially apparent in later stages where cachexia (the wasting of the body as fat and then muscle are used for energy) accounts for about one-third of actual causes of death. But just as we would the Olympic athlete to pursue the most nutrient-rich calories to best prepare their body, so should the person with the cancer diagnosis.

Protein sources should consist of lean meats such as poultry and fish, legumes such as beans and peas, eggs, nuts and seeds, and moderated amounts of dairy if it is easily digested. Protein powders and shakes can be an easy introduction of increased protein, especially if a person is intolerant to solids. Whey, pea, and rice proteins are all good options. Soy, which is a phytoestrogen, should be avoided with any sex hormone related cancers (breast, ovary, or prostate) or in colon cancer, due to increased risk factors of this mild estrogen component.

In addition to lean proteins, good oils such as olive oil, coconut oil, and avocados can be an easy way to take in extra energy and help the body store more energy as lean tissue as opposed to fat, which is important in slowing the effects of cachexia.

Arguably as important as keeping protein stores high is using plants as medicine to aid in the fight against cancer. Vegetables, fruits, and even teas should be consumed liberally, as the benefits of having these in high amounts are innumerable. The high fiber content of fruits and vegetables can ward off digestive side effects from commonly used medications. High amounts of color in fruits and vegetables reveal their high level of anti-oxidants, the body's best anti-cancer defense.

The more variety the better, as each color contains different bioflavonoids, which have different tissue affinities in the body. Most people think of dark berries, which are a great choice, but don't forget the brighter colors of red, yellow, and green, such as bell peppers, and dark leafy greens, or green and white tea varieties that offer great anti-oxidant potential.

The cruciferous family of vegetables, including broccoli, cauliflower, kale, and Brussels sprouts, contain an especially potent antioxidant called indole-3-carbinol (I3C). In addition to its role as an antioxidant, I3C and its breakdown product called diindolymethane (DIM) help to process hormones, especially estrogen, out of the body. This is especially important in cancers that are often induced or propagated by these hormones, such as breast, ovary and prostate. Studies have

shown a decrease in cancer rates in all of these cancers, as well as colon, lung, and esophageal cancers, in groups that consume high amounts of vegetables in the cruciferous family. One caveat to increasing these veggies in your diet is that they can decrease thyroid function in those with hypothyroidism, and in this group the cruciferous family should be moderated—usually to a couple of servings per week (consult your physician).

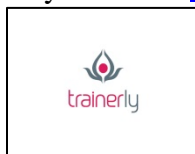
In addition to anti-oxidant value, many vegetables and some fruit also provide anti-microbial and anti-viral activity, including garlic, onions, spinach, and pumpkin. A diet high in these foods can help prevent the secondary infections that often occur in late stage cancers. Other vegetables, namely artichokes, parsley, beets, and again the cruciferous family, serve to help the liver naturally detoxify and process toxins including pharmaceutical metabolites, which is an important consideration when high amounts of medications are being taken.

In all cases, vegetables should be fresh and organic when possible and frozen if fresh aren't available. Raw, juiced, lightly steamed, or quickly sautéed vegetables (in olive or avocado oil) tend to be the most nutrient-dense.

Many theorize that the rise in processed food availability is directly correlated to our rise in cancer rates in the last 100 years. Although I think the increase is likely multi-factorial, it is certainly probable that we not only take cancer causing foods into our systems at an increasing rate, but we also have let these foods take the place of foods that we know can fight and win against disease. Foods other than fruits, vegetables, and proteins should certainly be consumed as well, including grains and dairy if you are tolerant to it. As often as possible, these foods should be “whole” foods: unadulterated and not processed (the foods primarily around the periphery of the grocery store and with an ingredient list that you understand). Sweets should be the same: natural ingredients and low in sugar. Honey and agave nectar can be a great way to add a little sweet and they also have anti-microbial properties.

Fighting cancer is a difficult and scary proposition, but fueling the body for the fight doesn't have to be. A return to natural food sources, high vegetable and fruit content, and lean protein can serve as a defense and aid in recovery so that you can put the battle behind you, or even better, possibly prevent it in the first place.

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