

There are many questions about what to eat after a breast cancer diagnosis. There is no nutritional plan guaranteed to prevent breast cancer or to protect women with breast cancer from a recurrence. Recommendations are based on research, they are designed to lower cancer risk, improve food tolerance during treatment and improve your sense of wellbeing.

Changing your relationship with food and eating involves a major shift in thinking, feeling and doing. Your food goal while dealing with breast cancer should be one of overall health and nutrition, providing your body with the support and energy it needs

# Nutrition and Breast Cancer

to maintain your immune system, and cope with treatments, fatigue and emotions.

Choosing, making and eating food with an 'abundance model' includes the pleasures of delicious wholesome choices, many tastes, ample portions, not feeling

limited, not counting calories and eating when hungry. Diets that include too many rules and restrictions (such as 'do not' and 'should not') leave you feeling bad or guilty with unmet hunger and cravings, or concerned that your choice may be



## TIPS FOR EATING DURING CHEMOTHERAPY

Chemotherapy can cause a drop in white blood cells, which can increase the risk of getting an infection; follow good food hygiene guidelines when storing, preparing and cooking food to reduce your risk of getting a tummy bug or food poisoning.

**1. Reduced appetite.** If your appetite is small eat little and often.

- i. Eat five to six small meals or snacks each day instead of three bigger meals.
- ii. Drink smoothies, juices or soup if you don't feel like eating solid food.
- iii. Do something active, if you feel able to, as exercise can help increase your appetite.
- iv. Be careful not to reduce your appetite by drinking too much liquid before or during meals.

**2. Increased appetite.** For example, some drugs can make you hungry, which combined with reduced activity levels can increase your risk of weight gain.

- i. Eat plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables.
- ii. Choose low-fat foods and drinks.
- iii. Watch out for the sugar content of food including some 'diet' foods.
- iv. Avoid sugary drinks.

**3. Nausea (feeling sick) and vomiting (being sick) can be a problem for**

**some people during and after their chemotherapy treatments.** Antiemetic drugs can help with nausea and vomiting.

- i. Drink plenty of fluids, such as water or herbal teas.
- ii. Taking frequent small sips is better than trying to drink large amounts in one go.
- iii. Eating little and often can help if you're feeling sick.
- iv. Herbal teas such as mint or ginger can also help settle the stomach.
- v. Some people find that eating cold food makes them feel less sick because hot food can produce more of a smell.

**4. Sores in the mouth can make eating painful.**

- i. Clean your teeth or dentures with a soft brush after eating and floss gently.
- ii. Use an alcohol-free mouthwash.
- iii. Choose soft or liquid foods such as soups, stews, smoothies and desserts.
- iv. Soothe your mouth and gums with ice cubes and sugar-free ice lollies.
- v. Drink sugar-free fizzy drinks or better still sparkling water to freshen your mouth.
- vi. Use a straw to drink.
- vii. Avoid crunchy, salty, very spicy, acidic or hot foods.
- viii. Avoid citrus drinks like lemon, lime, orange and grapefruit juice.
- ix. Smoking and drinking alcohol can make a sore mouth worse.

**5. Changes in the your sense of taste.**

This can be common during chemotherapy, making foods taste bland or different. Try a variety of foods to find the ones you like the best. Some types of chemotherapy can give you a metallic taste in your mouth. Using reusable plastic or wooden cutlery, instead of metal, can help reduce the metal taste. Using glass pots and pans to cook with can also help.

**6. Constipation.** Eating and drinking less than usual, being less active and taking certain medications can all lead to constipation. Drink plenty of fluids (six to eight glasses a day) and do some regular, gentle exercise such as walking. If constipation persists and becomes painful speak to a doctor for advice. Eating high-fibre foods can help if you're constipated. These include:

- i. wholemeal bread and pasta;
- ii. brown rice;
- iii. high-fibre breakfast cereal, such as bran flakes or shredded wheat;
- iv. beans and lentils;
- v. vegetables (fresh or frozen); and
- vi. fresh, frozen, canned and dried fruit.

**7. Diarrhoea.** Occasionally some chemotherapy drugs can cause this. Persistent diarrhoea can lead to dehydration and weakness or fatigue. Ask your doctors for advice on any medication you can take.

harming your body further. Stress and depression-related eating are common when there are too many restrictions. An abundance of healthy, delicious food often results in a better-nourished and healthier self.

This doesn't necessarily mean 'eat what you want'. The reasoning behind this philosophy often comes from pity, a desire for 'comfort food' during this difficult time, or advice to prevent you from losing too much weight from the chemotherapy treatment. The idea that you can eat a tub of ice cream in one go or a slab of chocolate a day is not great for your body. The impact that sugar will have on your insulin levels, inflammation and gut microbiome would be enormous with a negative effect on your immune system. Keeping your insulin levels under control (through diet and physical activity) can cut your risk of cancer recurrence by 50% and decrease cancer mortality by two-thirds. It's also been shown that decreasing inflammation can help reduce cancer growth, boost treatment efficacy and diminish side effects. Refined flours and sugars, processed food, fast food and fizzy drinks increase the enzymes that promote inflammation. So, avoid pro-inflammatory foods and increase your intake of ingredients that have anti-inflammatory properties and nutrient-dense food.

Healthy food choices include:

- a variety of fruits and vegetables, including salad and cruciferous vegetables (for example leafy greens, broccoli, cauliflower, cabbage, kale, bok choy, arugula, brussels sprouts, spinach, watercress and radishes);
- foods that are rich in fibre, such as whole grains, beans, and legumes;
- low-fat milk and dairy products;
- eating more plant-based protein (soy and beans) and less animal-based protein;
- foods rich in vitamin D and other vitamins;
- foods, particularly spices, with anti-inflammatory properties for example olive oil, tomatoes, fish, leafy greens, almonds, strawberries, blueberries, ginger, garlic and turmeric to name a few;
- foods, mainly plant-based, containing antioxidants, such as dark chocolate, blueberries, pecans, leafy greens, avocado, artichoke, squash, goji berries, and many more;
- limit your intake of caffeine and alcohol (your liver is already dealing with all the medication it doesn't need to work harder); and
- drinking plenty of water.

Simple tasks like shopping and cooking can seem exhausting during your treatment and as you recover. Try to accept any offers of help, even if you're used to coping on your own. You can also take advantage of online shopping and delivery services; however, don't slip into the convenience of ordering fast foods. It's important to have fresh food in

your diet, so if you can't shop regularly, frozen and tinned fruit and vegetables may be your next best option.

Each person is different and may have different dietary needs. Seeking professional guidance from a dietician regarding your nutrition may be advised.



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