HEALTHY DIET AND BREAST CANCER

Eating well before, during, and after treatment can help make you feel better and give you an overall sense of well being. Maintaining proper nutrition throughout the course of your treatment will help keep your immune system strong and may help you tolerate your treatments better.

WHAT IS A HEALTHY DIET?
The AICR (American Institute for Cancer Research) recommends a mostly plant based diet that limits red meat (steak, hamburger, and pork) to under 18 oz a week and avoids processed meats (ham, bacon, sausage, and hot dogs). Below are general guidelines of a healthy diet:

**FRUITS AND VEGETABLES** provide vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, and fiber needed for good health. Your goal should be to eat at least 1 ½ cups of fresh fruit and at least 2 cups of vegetables a day. Think color and aim to eat all the colors of the rainbow.

**GRAINS (CARBOHYDRATES)** fuel your body and give you energy. Aim to eat 5-6 servings (unless otherwise specified) and at least half of these servings should be whole grains. In general, a serving is a slice of bread, ½ cup cooked pasta or rice, and a cup of ready to eat cereal.

**PROTEIN FOODS** such as eggs, beans, nuts, seeds, chicken, turkey and fish provide the body with the “building blocks” for muscles and provide B vitamins. In addition to being a good source of protein, fish (tuna, salmon, and halibut) and nuts contain omega-3 fatty acids which can help reduce inflammation. Your goal for these foods is 5-6 ½ ounces day. Tip: choose lean cuts of meats and either bake or broil them.

**DAIRY PRODUCTS** help improve bone health and also provide your body with vitamins and minerals. Choose low fat dairy products and aim to eat 3 servings a day. A serving could be 6 oz of yogurt, 1 ½ ounces of cheese and/or 8 ounce glass of milk.

ARE THERE PARTICULAR FOODS THAT HELP FIGHT CANCER?
There is no one single food that can protect or prevent cancer but research has shown that eating a more plant based diet can help lower the risk of many cancers. However, foods can both directly and indirectly fight cancer. For example, a diet that is high in fruits and vegetables has been directly linked with protection against cancer. This is mainly due to the compounds found in these foods; antioxidants, phytochemicals, and fiber. Being overweight due to a diet that is excessive in simple sugars and saturated fat can increase the risk of several types of cancer. As a result, the link between obesity and cancer is an example of an indirect link. Therefore, choosing more fruits and vegetables, which are low in calories, will help you to keep your weight within a healthy range. Finally, whole grains and beans are moderate in calories and are good sources of fiber, which also helps to control your weight.
**CAN I EAT SWEETS?**
Avoiding foods that you like or may crave at times may only make you want that food even more. If you incorporate the above guidelines, an occasional “sweet treat” is fine. An example of a “sweet treat” that also provides antioxidants and protein is dark chocolate and natural peanut butter.

**WHAT ABOUT FATS?** Healthy fat in your diet is important. Fat helps your body absorb some vitamins and fat can help make you feel full and satisfied. Examples of these good or healthy fats are monounsaturated fats such as olive oil, corn or canola oil. It is best to limit or avoid saturated fats (butter and cream) as well as trans fats, which are found in many commercially baked/processed foods as well as in margarine, for overall good health.

**WHAT ABOUT DIETARY SUPPLEMENTS?**
Just because a product advertises being “all natural” does not necessarily mean that it is 100% safe to take. When compounds get isolated and made into a supplement, there are possibilities that potential interactions can occur. Also, these supplements can cause other side effects and may interfere with medications you are taking including chemotherapy. Therefore, the overall goal is to obtain all the necessary nutrition and nutrients through your food and diet. It is always important to discuss any supplements you may want to take with your doctor or registered dietitian so it can be determined if they are safe for you.

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References: