Survivorship & Nutrition—Part 2

Guest columnist Maura Harrigan, MS, RD, is the nutritionist in the Connecticut Challenge Cancer Survivorship Clinic at Yale Cancer Center.

See Part 1 of this 2-part series on the YaleCares web page.

Nutrition plan overview

As described in Part 1, individualized nutrition care plans are discussed with each patient in the Survivorship Clinic. General recommendations include:

- Achieve and maintain a healthy weight
- Eat a predominantly plant-based diet
- Eat a rainbow of colors
- Limit consumption of processed and red meats to once a month
- Emphasize omega-3 fatty acids
- Observe food safety practices
- Limit consumption of alcohol

We discussed some of these last month; the rest are explored below.

Limit consumption of processed and red meats

Processed meats, such as hotdogs, dried or smoked meats, and luncheon meats, are generally high in saturated fats and sodium. Many processed meats also contain nitrates as preservatives. While nitrates themselves have not been shown to cause cancer, there is conflicting evidence about whether they are converted to cancer-causing compounds in humans. It is prudent to limit consumption to once a month.

Observe food safety practices

All patients, especially those who are immunosuppressed, need to protect their immune system from food-borne illness.

Limit consumption of alcohol

Moderate drinking is one drink per day for women or 2 per day for men. The benefits related to cardiovascular protection are not specific for any cancers and may be outweighed by calorie intake. For caloric reference, alcohol contributes 7 kcal/g, fat 9 kcal/g, protein 4 kcal/g, and carbohydrate 4 kcal/g.

What about soy?

High doses of soy isoflavones as supplements are not recommended for those with estrogen-receptor-positive breast cancer. The role of soy foods and supplements is uncertain, but soy is an excellent plant source of protein that can be recommended.

Putting it all together

Here’s how this information is translated into easily digested educational bites (pun intended) for patients:

- Eat early and eat often.
- Eat breakfast like a king, lunch like a prince, dinner like a pauper.
- Fill ¾ of your plate with foods from plants – vegetables, whole grains, and fruits.

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• Eat a rainbow of colors – blue, purple, red, orange, yellow, white, and green.
• Use meat as a condiment.
• Don’t drink your calories.
• Downsize portion sizes.
• Read labels - choose foods with a short ingredient list.
• Don’t eat or drink anything obtained at a drive-through window (e.g. A large Dunkin’ Donuts coffee extra light, extra sweet has 450 calories and 30 grams of sucrose.)

Summing it up
If one follows all (well, most) of the above, then there’s always room for _________. (Fill in the blank with a favorite treat. For 99% of clinic patrons, it’s chocolate.)

If I were to give this nutritional approach a name, it would be “Flexitarian.” Not quite full-blown vegetarian, but far from the typical American carnivore cuisine. Our survivors like the “flex” part, in that eating can still be fun and pleasurable.

Healthy eating!

In the News

• Diane Meier named MacArthur Fellow—the so-called “Genius Grants”. Dr. Meier is a geriatrician and the founding Director of the Center to Advance Palliative Care (CAPC). CAPC has promoted the integration of palliative care programs into institutions nation-wide through education, research, and consultation.

Journal Watch

  o Staying Alive: Physical Activity After Breast Cancer Diagnosis—news article on this study

Continuing Education

Yale

• Oct. 4, 7:30am – 2:15pm. Oncology Nursing Council Fall Symposium: Challenges in Adult Oncology Nursing Practice. Compelling topics, nationally known speakers. Info: Jamy Stenger at jamy.stenger@ynhh.org or (203) 688-6437.
• Yale Bioethics Center’s End of Life Issues Study Group resumes monthly presentations. This year’s theme is Issues of Justice in End of Life Care. 5:30pm, 77 Prospect Street, Rm B012.
  o Oct 7 Ruth McCorkle: Hidden Emotional, Economic, and Physical Costs to Caregivers & Effective Interventions on Their Behalf
• Oct 18, 9:30am – 12:00N. Survivorship Boot Camp, sponsored by YCC Survivorship Program. Your nutrition exercise and support/adjustment questions answered. Oak Lane Country Club, Woodbridge. RSVP by Oct 14 to 203-785-2273.
• Oct 24, 9 – 1. Compassionate Care of the Dying: Training in Authentic Presence. Yale School of Nursing. CE for MD, RN, SW.
• Oct 22, 12:00 – 1:00pm. Milestones in Public Health Grand Rounds: Health Disparities in Breast Cancer. Lucile L. Adams-Campbell, PhD Director, Howard University Cancer Ctr. Winslow Auditorium Yale School of Public Health 60 College Street

Connecticut

• Nov 13, 8:00am – 4:30pm. Helping Connecticut Clinicians Manage Pain Safely: An Update on Clinical Strategies that Avoid Medication Abuse. CT Pain Initiative. Stamford. Info: lclougher@charter.net

Elsewhere

• Apr – Nov 2009. 2-session 2009 Program in Palliative Care Education and Practice. Harvard Medical School, Cambridge, MA.