
Healthy Eating Guidelines For Cancer Survivors

Healthy food and lifestyle choices can help you recover from cancer treatment and may reduce the chance of cancer coming back. Healthy choices also help to reduce the risk of heart disease, diabetes and other types of cancer.

As a cancer survivor you may have unique nutrition needs that affect your food choices. If you are having problems eating, are underweight, still have side effects or have long-term health effects from cancer or its treatment, the information in this handout may not be the best for you. Contact a registered dietitian to talk about food choices that meet your needs.



Steps you can take

As you recover, and are able to, choose a balanced diet based on cancer prevention guidelines. You can work towards your healthy eating goals and improve your health by changing your food choices over time. For many people making small changes over time is realistic and easier to maintain than making changes quickly. Find a way to make changes that work for you.

Keeping a food journal can help you learn about your eating habits and work towards your healthy eating goals.

Eat a variety of vegetables, fruits, whole grains, and protein foods every day

Plant-based foods provide a variety of cancer fighting compounds. These include fibre, vitamins, minerals, and phytochemicals. All plant-based foods including vegetables, fruit, whole grains, legumes, nuts, seeds and spices are sources of cancer fighting compounds. To protect against cancer, eating plenty of and a variety of different plant-based foods is more important than focusing on eating any single food.

Use your plate as a guide:

- Fill half of your plate with vegetables and fruit. Choose more non-starchy vegetables than starchy vegetables.

- Non-starchy vegetables include broccoli, cabbage, leafy greens, bok choy, zucchini, green and long beans, carrots, celery, cucumber, onion, garlic, tomato, and peppers along with all other vegetables. Starchy vegetables include potatoes, yams, sweet potato, plantain and corn.
- Fill one-quarter of your plate with whole grains such as oats, barley, whole grain whole wheat and quinoa.
- Fill one-quarter of your plate with protein foods like legumes, fish, tofu, eggs, low fat dairy, meat or poultry. Legumes include soybeans, dried peas, beans, lentils, and chickpeas.
 - A healthy eating pattern can include moderate amounts of fish, poultry, eggs, low fat dairy and small amounts of red meats such as beef and pork. These foods are good sources of protein and other nutrients that support good health.

Limit highly processed foods

These foods and drinks are high in sugar, sodium and fats. They are often low in the nutrients that help keep us healthy and too high in calories which can lead to weight gain. Eat these foods less often and when you eat them, keep portions small.

Highly processed foods include:

- sugary drinks like pop, soda, sweetened coffee and tea beverages, lemonade and fruit drinks
- chips and other snack foods
- French fries
- instant noodles and packaged soups
- deep fried foods
- sweetened cereals
- candy
- ice cream
- baked goods such as pie, cake, donuts and cookies

Eat less red meat and eat very little, if any, processed meats

Have red meat such as beef, pork, lamb and goat less often and take smaller portions. If you eat red meat, have less than 500 grams (18 ounces) cooked each week.

Avoid processed meats such as sausages, bacon, ham, deli meats and hotdogs, or have them on special occasions.

For cancer prevention it is best not to drink alcohol

If you choose to drink alcohol, limit to one drink per day for women or two drinks per day for men.

One drink is equal to:

- 341 mL (12 oz.) bottle of 5% beer, cider or cooler
- 142 mL (5 oz.) of 12% wine
- 43 mL (1.5 oz.) 40% spirits, such as rye, vodka, whisky, rum and gin.

Eat food rather than take supplements to protect against cancer

High dose vitamin, mineral, herbal, and other supplements should be avoided during cancer treatment.

Vitamin, mineral, or herbal supplements have not been shown to prevent cancer from getting worse or returning. Supplements do not give the same cancer protective benefits as eating whole foods. Research suggests that some supplements could be harmful and may increase the risk of cancers for some people.

Speak with a doctor or registered dietitian about your individual needs before taking supplements.

Work towards your best weight

Being either underweight or overweight increases the risk for health problems. A healthy diet and active lifestyle can help you manage your weight. If you have concerns about your weight, talk to a registered dietitian about a healthy eating plan that works for you.

Be physically active

Being active can help you be at a healthy weight, maintain health and feel well. It may help reduce fatigue, maintain strength and lower the risk of some cancers returning.

Before becoming more physically active, check with your doctor or health care team to see what types and amounts of activities are best for you.



Additional Resources

For information and advice based on your specific food and nutrition needs and preferences, call **8-1-1** and ask to speak to a HealthLink BC dietitian.

For additional information, see the following resources:

- HealthLink BC www.healthlinkbc.ca – Get medically approved non-emergency health information.
- Dietitian Services Fact Sheets - Available by mail (call **8-1-1**) or visit www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthy-eating:
 - Cancer Prevention Eating Guidelines <https://www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthy-eating/cancer-prevention-eating-guidelines>
 - Plant-based Diet Guidelines www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthy-eating/plant-based-diet-guidelines
 - Food Journaling: How to Keep Track of What You Eat www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthy-eating/food-journal
- Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines <https://csepguidelines.ca/>

These resources are provided as sources of additional information believed to be reliable and accurate at the time of publication and should not be considered an endorsement of any information, service, product or company.

Distributed by:

Dietitian Services at HealthLinkBC (formerly Dial-A-Dietitian), providing free nutrition information and resources for BC residents and health professionals. Go to www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthy-eating or call **8-1-1** (anywhere in BC). Interpreters are available in over 130 languages.