

INTRODUCTION

How Foods Fight Cancer

For many years, researchers have been investigating how food choices can help prevent cancer and, when cancer has been diagnosed, how these choices can improve survival. While their work is by no means finished, what is already known is nothing short of dramatic. Certain diet patterns seem to have a major effect, helping people diagnosed with cancer to live longer, healthier lives. Other diet choices are risky propositions, increasing the toll cancer takes.

Our goal is to translate scientific findings into simple, practical steps you can use in your own kitchen, at the grocery store, at restaurants—anywhere you're thinking about what to eat. We'll divide this information into eight sections and include key scientific information, meal-planning tips, and suggested steps you can take at home. We will also list recipes that illustrate the key points in each section. Some recipes embody more than one nutritional advantage, so we'll list especially good ones in more than one section. All the recipes (and more) are included in the back of this book.

Before we begin, one note of caution: As we explore the role of food in cancer, some people might feel a bit uneasy. If foods can affect cancer risk, they ask, does that mean I am somehow to blame for my illness? Did the foods I ate as a child cause this problem? Is our culture causing these problems?

It is, of course, only natural that concerns like these will cross our minds. However, let us encourage you to set blame aside. The fact is, some people do their very best to follow healthy lifestyles and still develop cancer. And you may have known people who smoke, drink heavily, and eat with absolute abandon and yet manage to live to a ripe old age. Unfortunately, it is easy to get cancer, and we cannot predict with certainty who will be affected by it and who will not. So let's focus not on blame but on what foods can do for you. As Jack Nicklaus used to say, you can spend all day trying to figure out why you hit your ball into the woods—or you can just go in and get it out.

Research into food's role in cancer survival grew from studies looking at the causes of the illness. As researchers compared the diets of people who developed cancer and those of people who remained healthy, finding many factors that do indeed influence cancer risk, they also had an opportunity to look forward, seeing how various eating patterns affect survival.

It turns out that many foods that help prevent cancer in the first place also seem to help us beat the disease when it has struck. Among the most important themes to emerge from research has been the fact that foods influence

hormones that fuel cancer growth. For example, diets that are very low in fat tend to reduce the amount of estrogens (female sex hormones) circulating in the bloodstream. That turns out to be a good thing, because taming estrogens seems to reduce the likelihood that cancer cells will multiply or spread. It is not just low-fat foods that help in this way. Fiber-rich foods reduce estrogens, too, and also reduce the amount of testosterone in the blood, which is of key importance in prostate cancer.

Many parts of the diet can help us stay healthy or regain health when we're dealing with illness. Vegetables, fruits, beans, soy products, and many other foods have been under study for some time. While we do not have all the answers, we have more than enough information to get started with healthier ways of eating.

As we begin, let us encourage you not to simply dabble with diet changes. If you or a loved one have been diagnosed with a major illness, it's time to take full advantage of what diet can do for you. Much as we might like to pretend that small diet changes help, the fact is that trimming a little fat here and adding a piece of fruit there does very little. That has been proven true in studies using diet to control cholesterol, diabetes, hypertension, osteoporosis, weight problems, and many other conditions. So we will not sell you short with half-baked dietary suggestions, and we will encourage you to jump in and take full advantage of what these foods can offer.

Chances are, you will love where you're headed. An exploration of healthy eating can not only bring you better health; it can also lead to new and interesting tastes, exotic restaurants, and some of the most remarkable aisles in the grocery store.

Yes, you'll have some challenges along the way. A new recipe might turn out stunningly or it could also be a dud. Don't worry. That's what experimenting is all about. But as you get to know what works for you, you'll discover a new world of healthy, powerful foods and delicious tastes, not to mention an entirely new way of thinking about food and health.