

Healthy Eating After a Diagnosis of Breast Cancer



UHN

A Handout for Patients and their Families



Many people wonder after a breast cancer diagnosis whether they could have done anything to prevent the disease. They also hope that they can do something to help treat their condition. It is important to realize that there are no specific dietary changes you need to make at this time. The most important steps you can take to prepare for your upcoming breast cancer treatment are to eat a properly balanced diet, get enough rest and exercise and to look after your emotional needs. This handout provides answers to some key nutrition and health-related questions you may have as you go through your treatment and recovery.

If you are having problems eating or experience unplanned weight loss, this information may not be appropriate for you. Speak with a registered dietitian about your nutritional needs.

If you have any nutrition-related questions or if you would like to make an appointment to see our dietitian, please contact or ask your doctor for a referral.

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Author: Andrea Firmin, Susan Haines, and the Breast Oncology Team at Mount Sinai Hospital

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University Health Network
Toronto General Hospital Toronto Western Hospital Princess Margaret Hospital

Healthy Eating: Canada's Food Guide

Canada's Food Guide encourages Canadians to enjoy a variety of foods from the four food groups while limiting added fats, salt and alcohol. The table below outlines the number of servings of each food group that men and women should eat daily to meet their caloric and nutritional needs.

See information about serving sizes on the next page.

For more information or to get a copy of Canada's Food Guide:

- Visit www.healthcanada.gc.ca/foodguide
- Call 1-800-OCananda (1-800-622-6232)

Food Group	19-30 years old		31-50 years old		51 + years old	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
Vegetables and Fruit	8	10	7	8	7	7
Grain Products	6	8	6	8	6	7
Milk and Alternatives	2	2	2	2	3	3
Meat and Alternatives	2	3	2	3	2	3

Adapted from http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/alt_formats/hpfb-dgpsa/pdf/food-guide_aliment/view_eatwell_vue_bienmang-eng.pdf

Canada's Food Guide recommendations are based on a moderately active person of average height and weight within each age and gender group. The guide may overestimate your individual needs for weight maintenance or weight loss. You may need to reduce the number of servings for some of the food groups to meet your goals. Speak with a registered dietitian to determine your individual recommendations.

Other Healthy Eating Tips

- ✓ Include one green vegetable and one orange vegetable daily.
- ✓ Choose whole grain products at least 50 per cent of the time.
- ✓ Choose lower fat dairy products and alternatives, such as soy and kefir (skim or 1% milk).
- ✓ Select lean cuts of meat, poultry and alternatives and prepare them with little or no added fat.
- ✓ Try to eat fish twice a week and include meat alternatives such as beans and lentils more often.
- ✓ Satisfy your thirst with water. Try flavoring the water with citrus fruits or berries.
- ✓ Limit the amount of salt and fat added during cooking and eating.



Review of Serving Sizes for Canada's Food Guide Food Groups

Food Group	Serving Size
Fruits and Vegetables	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ½ cup (125mL) fresh, frozen or canned fruits and vegetables • 1 cup (250mL) raw or ½ cup (125mL) cooked leafy vegetables • 1 whole fruit (fist-sized) • ½ cup 100 per cent pure juice
Grain Products	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 slice bread (35g) • ½ bagel (45g) • ½ pita or ½ torilla (35g) • ½ cup (125mL) cooked rice, bulgur, quinoa, pasta or couscous • 30g cold cereal • ¾ cup (175mL) hot cereal
Milk and Milk Alternatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 cup (250mL) milk, fortified soy beverage • ¾ cup (175mL) yogurt or kefir • 50g (1 ½ oz) cheese
Meat and Meat Alternatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 75g (2 ½ oz) or ½ cup (125mL) cooked fish, shellfish, poultry, lean meat • ¾ cup (175mL) cooked legumes (kidney beans, lentils) • 150g or ¾ cup (175mL) tofu • 2 eggs • 2 tbsp (30mL) peanut butter or nut butter • ¼ cup (60mL) shelled nuts and seeds
Fats and Oils	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limit to 2-3 tbsp (30-45mL) per day. This includes oil used in cooking, salad dressings, margarine and mayonnaise. • Best choices are canola oil, olive oil, soybean oil or non-hydrogenated margarines.

Consume a Low-fat Diet

Eating a low-fat diet may lower the risk of breast cancer returning. In 2006, researchers found that women who decreased their total fat intake to 20 per cent of their daily calories and lost an average of 3.5 kg (7.7 lbs) had a lower risk of a breast cancer relapse.

In addition to breast health benefits, a low-fat diet may help you lose weight or stay at a healthy body weight and can improve heart health. To achieve a low-fat diet, consume wholegrain foods, a variety of fruits and vegetables, low-fat meat and poultry, beans and legumes and low-fat dairy products.

Healthy Weight



During and after cancer treatment, it is important to try to achieve and maintain a healthy body weight. Being overweight can put you at higher risk of the cancer returning and may lower your chances of survival, especially if you are postmenopausal. Pre-menopausal women should also work toward a healthy body weight to lessen the chances of being overweight when menopause begins.

Women who are overweight are also at higher risk of lymphedema, a condition that can develop after breast cancer surgery if the lymph nodes are removed from under the arm. With this condition, lymph fluid does not drain properly and the arm swells, providing another reason to aim for a healthy weight.

If you are trying to lose weight, aim for a slow, gradual weight loss of one to two pounds per week. It is not absolutely necessary that you achieve your ideal body weight; even losing 10 pounds can improve your cancer risk and overall health. Following a low-fat diet, eating smaller portion sizes and getting regular physical exercise can help you achieve and maintain a healthy body weight.

Physical Activity



Being mildly to moderately active during and after treatment for breast cancer has been shown to reduce treatment side effects, improve overall health and may improve outcomes. It is also a great way to help control your weight.

If you are new to physical activity, are currently receiving chemotherapy or have metastatic disease, consult your physician before beginning your activities.

When you are ready to begin, start slowly and gradually increase your activity level over time as you feel comfortable. One of the best ways to get moving is walking, since it is easy, inexpensive and can be done anywhere.

Set a goal that you can measure when you start exercising, such as 'I will take a 20-minute walk three times a week.' Keep a record of your walks to help motivate you to continue. Set a new goal when you can regularly achieve your previous goal and find that activity level easy, such as 'I will take a 30-minute walk four times a week.'

If you feel unable to participate in physical exercise during your cancer treatment, consider relaxation techniques such as yoga or meditation until you are well enough to resume activity. Remember that every bit helps. Take one day at a time and do what you can, when you can.

Soy Products and Phytoestrogens

Phytoestrogens, also called plant estrogens, are substances found in plant foods that may act like the hormone estrogen. The main food sources of phytoestrogens are soybeans, soy foods (such as tofu and soy milk) and ground flaxseeds. Other plant foods may contain phytoestrogens, but not in high amounts.

Breast cancer patients often believe they should avoid dietary soy foods due to their naturally occurring phytoestrogens. It is safe to include two servings of soy-based, phytoestrogen-rich foods daily in your diet.

Serving examples include:

¾ cup (150g) tofu

¼ cup (60mL) of soy nuts

1 tablespoon (15mL) of flaxseed

1 cup (250mL) of soy milk

We DO NOT recommend taking soy, phytoestrogen or isoflavone supplement products in pill or powder form because the phytoestrogen levels in such products are too high.

Alcohol



If you are being treated for cancer, you may want to avoid alcohol altogether. It is especially important to avoid alcohol during chemotherapy or if you are taking certain medications, since alcohol can alter their effectiveness.

Research has shown that a higher alcohol intake can increase the risk of breast cancer. A recent study reported that women who consumed between one and three drinks per day also had a 32 per cent increased risk of developing breast cancer, compared to non-drinkers. The risk increased by 51 per cent for those who had more than three drinks per day.

If you choose to drink alcohol, we recommend limiting your intake to one drink per day. One drink of alcohol is equivalent to:

- 12 fluid ounces (355mL) beer
- 5 fluid ounces (148mL) wine
- 1.5 fluid ounces (44mL) spirits (e.g. vodka, rye, rum, gin)

Also, if you choose to consume alcohol, ensure you have an adequate intake of folate (folic acid), as this vitamin has been shown to negate the increased risk of breast cancer associated with alcohol. For food sources of folate, read the table in the section on vitamin and mineral supplements.

For information on reducing your alcohol intake, follow the link to the Canadian Cancer Society's page on cutting down your alcohol intake.

The Sugar Myth

Many patients wonder whether they should avoid sugars after a cancer diagnosis over concern that sugar feeds cancer. This idea is false. However, many high-sugar foods and beverages such as pastries, cookies, candy, pop and fruit drinks do not provide good nutrition. These foods offer little more than empty calories that can lead to weight gain. Snacking often on high-sugar, low-nutrient foods reduces the quality of your diet because such foods replace healthier options.

Fruits, milk and certain vegetables contain some natural sugar. Grains contain starch, which the body turns into sugar. It is important to consume these foods because they contribute vitamins, minerals, fibre and other nutrients to your diet.

Vitamin and Mineral Supplementation

Taking a multivitamin is safe during and after treatment for breast cancer because the amounts of vitamins and minerals contained in these pills are approximately the same as the amounts found in a healthy, balanced diet.

We do not recommend supplementing with high doses of antioxidants such as vitamins A, C and E, and doing so may even interfere with some treatments. Research does not support the use of antioxidant supplements to help slow tumour growth or the spread of cancer. Including seven to eight servings of fruits and vegetables (which contain antioxidants) in your diet every day will help you meet your daily vitamin and mineral requirements.

The following table shows fruits, vegetables and other foods you can try to include in your diet more often, since they are great sources of vitamins, minerals, antioxidants and phytochemicals. Cruciferous vegetables contain a compound called Sulforaphane, which some recent research shows may help to minimize tumour growth. Folate-rich foods are included in the table so that you can ensure that you are getting enough folate if you choose to drink alcohol regularly.

Where to find them...	
Vitamin A	Spinach, apricots, carrots, green leafy vegetables, kale, sweet potatoes, papayas, mangos, squash
Vitamin C	Red pepper, oranges, strawberries, broccoli, kiwi, cantaloupe, 100 per cent fruit juice
Cruciferous vegetables	Broccoli, cauliflower, broccoli sprouts, brussels sprouts, cabbage, kale, collard greens, turnips
Folate	Fortified cereals and grain products, green vegetables, orange fruits, beans and legumes

Nothing beats nature's mix of vitamins and minerals, so try to choose whole foods more often to meet your nutrient needs.

Herbal Supplements

Many people think dietary supplements are harmless because they are “natural.” But dietary supplements may cause unwanted and possibly harmful health effects after a cancer diagnosis, and may interfere with cancer treatments.

Weighing the possible health benefits against the risks of taking herbal supplements can be challenging, since very little research has been done in this area. Always ensure your doctor is aware of any complementary or alternative therapies you may be doing.

Vitamin D

Generally known for its role in promoting bone health, new research suggests that vitamin D may also play a role in reducing cancer risk. For women, vitamin D may have added benefits, such as lowering the risk of developing breast cancer and improving outcomes after a breast cancer diagnosis.

Vitamin D	Where to find it...
Food Sources	Fatty fish, such as salmon, mackerel, trout, and sardines Fortified milk, milk products, milk alternatives Fortified orange juice Mushrooms
Sunlight	Expose 25 per cent of your body (arms and legs) to sun for 5-10 minutes per day between March and October.
Supplements	Recommendations* for people aged: 19-50 years 200 IU/day 51-70 years 400 IU/day 71 + years 600 IU/day You can get these amounts in a multivitamin or in a vitamin D supplement.

*Recommendations from Health Canada. Amounts given are over and above intake from dietary sources.

Always check with your doctor before taking any supplements, especially if you are considering taking higher-than-recommended amounts. Do not exceed 2000 IU of vitamin D per day from food and supplements.

Calcium

Calcium is important for maintaining bone health. The following are recommendations for daily calcium intake.

- People 31-50 years old need 1000 mg of calcium per day.
- People over 50 years old need 1200 mg of calcium per day.

You can meet these daily recommendations by eating a balanced diet and including 2-3 servings of milk or milk alternative products each day.

Some breast cancer treatments increase the risk of bone loss, and you may need to get additional calcium and vitamin D. Speak to a dietitian or your doctor to determine your individual needs. Do not exceed 2400 mg of calcium per day from food and supplements combined.

Food Safety

It is important to take food safety seriously if you have chemotherapy or radiation therapy during your treatment. Cancer treatments can weaken your immune system, so you are more likely to become ill if you consume bacteria from unclean or undercooked foods. Here are some food safety tips:

- Wash your hands well with soap and warm water or anti-bacterial hand wash before preparing and eating food.
- Keep your food preparation and storage surfaces clean.
- Separate raw meats from ready-to-eat foods.
- Ensure meat, poultry, fish and eggs are cooked to the proper temperature.
- Avoid unpasteurized foods.
- When eating in restaurants, avoid foods that are more likely to have bacterial contamination, such as sushi, salad bars or undercooked meats.
- Store foods promptly in the refrigerator (4°C or 40°F) to minimize bacterial growth.

Samples of a Typical Day of Eating

<p><u>Breakfast:</u> ½ cup cold cereal 1 cup milk (skim or 1%) ½ cup berries 1 slice whole wheat toast 1 tbsp peanut butter Tea or coffee</p> <p><u>Snack:</u> 1 medium apple</p> <p><u>Lunch:</u> 1 sandwich 2 slices whole grain bread or 6-inch pita 1 ¼ oz low fat turkey/chicken 1 tbsp low-fat mayo lettuce and tomato 1 cup vegetable soup ¾ cup low fat yogurt water, tea or coffee</p> <p><u>Snack:</u> Vegetable sticks (e.g. carrots)</p> <p><u>Dinner:</u> 1 medium potato or ½ cup rice ½ cup steamed broccoli ½ cup roasted butternut squash 2 ½ oz (75g) fish 1 cup milk (skim or 1%) water, tea, coffee</p> <p><u>Snack:</u> 2 cups low fat popcorn</p> <p>(1640 kcal/day)</p>	<p><u>Breakfast:</u> ¾ cup oatmeal 1 cup milk (skim or 1%) or low-fat soy milk ½ cup canned peaches 6 almonds Tea or coffee</p> <p><u>Snack:</u> 6 (24g) whole wheat crackers</p> <p><u>Lunch:</u> 2 cups salad 2 tbsp low-fat salad dressing vinaigrette 1 ¼ oz (37.5g) tuna, salmon or lean chicken or 1/3 cup beans/legumes 1 slice pumpernickel toast Water, tea or coffee</p> <p><u>Snack:</u> ¾ cup yogurt (skim or 1%) ½ cup berries</p> <p><u>Dinner:</u> 1 cup whole wheat pasta ½ cup tomato sauce 2 ½ oz (75g) lean ground beef ½ cup grilled vegetables (peppers, mushrooms, zucchini, onion) 1 cup milk (skim or 1%) or low fat soy milk</p> <p>(1540 kcal/day)</p>	<p><u>Breakfast:</u> 1 egg poached, soft or hard boiled 1 slice (1 oz) low fat cheese 2 slices whole grain toast 1 tsp low fat margarine 1 slice tomato 1 orange Tea or coffee</p> <p><u>Lunch:</u> 1 cup brown or basmati rice 1 cup vegetables (steamed or stir-fried with water and minimal oil) 1 ¼ oz (37.5g) chicken</p> <p><u>Snack:</u> ¾ cup yogurt (skim or 1%) 1 small banana</p> <p><u>Dinner:</u> 1 cup brown or basmati rice, or 1 roti, small naan or pita bread (6-inch, whole grain) 1 cup vegetables (steamed or stir-fried) ¾ cup (75g) beans/legumes</p> <p><u>Note:</u> Prepare vegetables and proteins with herbs, spices, onions and garlic as desired.</p> <p>Limit the addition of high-fat cream, coconut milk, butter or oil.</p> <p>(1500 kcal/day)</p>
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<http://www.mountsinai.on.ca/care/mkbc/programs-and-classes/taking-charge>

Resources

Canadian Cancer Society:

www.cancer.ca

Canada's Food Guide:

<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/food-guide-aliment/index-eng.php>

Marvella Koffler Breast Centre at Mount Sinai Hospital:

<http://www.mountsinai.on.ca/care/mkbc>

5 to 10 a day for better health:

www.5to10aday.com

Food Safety Network:

www.foodsafetynetwork.ca

British Columbia Cancer Agency:

www.bccancer.bc.ca

Caring 4 Cancer:

<http://www.caring4cancer.com/go/cancer/nutrition/eating-well-nutrition>

Taking Charge: Healthy Lifestyle Choices after Breast Cancer

The Taking Charge program is for women who have finished active treatment (surgery, chemotherapy and/or radiation). The goal of the program is to educate women about healthier diet and physical activity choices that will have a positive influence on overall health and may decrease the risk of breast cancer recurrence. During the program, you have access to a registered nurse, social worker, dietitian and fitness expert, all of who provide guidance to groups and individuals about making the best lifestyle choices. The Taking Charge program includes five two-hour sessions run over 10 weeks and is free of charge.

To sign up, please contact Linda Muraca, RN at 416-586-4800 ext. 5190, press 0.

For more information, check out the website:

<http://www.mountsinai.on.ca/care/mkbc/programs-and-classes/taking-charge>



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