

The right foods arm your body against cancer

BY LESLIE GOLDMAN
SPECIAL WRITER

Want to fight your own war against cancer? Think of the entire grocery store as your pharmacy, from the bakery's whole-wheat bread to the Asian foods aisle's green tea.

As you fill your shopping cart with DNA-saving grapefruit, tumor-topping salmon and tissue-protective tofu, you can rest assured that these healthy food choices are bolstering your natural defense and nourishing your body.

That sense of taking control of your health, in turn, nourishes your soul better than mashed potatoes, macaroni and cheese or any other comfort food could.

According to the American Cancer Society, dietary factors cause one-third of the approximately 500,000 annual cancer-related deaths. That matches the 33 percent of cancer-related deaths caused by cigarette smoking.

What this means, essentially, is that eating saturated fat-laden, excessively charred or other unhealthy foods is just as bad as puffing on what many health care practitioners refer to as "cancer sticks."

Think of good eating habits as an analogy to wearing a seat belt when driving: It won't prevent you from having a fatal accident but it can protect you should you crash.

Prevention is the key.

One of the ways in which foods such as vitamin C-rich strawberries help lower one's risk of cancer relates to nat-

urally occurring substances called antioxidants. To process every breath of oxygen we take, our bodies produce toxic molecules called free radicals.

Free radicals can damage the DNA of our cells, and this damage, if left unchecked by the body's immune system, can lead to the first step of tumor formation.

Anti-oxidants, such as those found in tomatoes in the form of lycopene or beta carotene in carrots, neutralize these toxic free radicals.

Here are some other ways foods combat cancer: Cruciferous vegetables, such as broccoli, contain sulforaphane, which bolsters the amounts of certain enzymes that are responsible for whisking away carcinogenic leftovers. Garlic contributes by slowing the rate of production of cancer-causing chemicals called phase I enzymes.

And tofu, so-often mentioned by the health and science media for its cancer-fighting properties, works by protecting reproductive tissues.

Reproductive tissues such as the breasts are considered to be more cancer-prone because their cells divide very quickly when set off by the body's sex hormones (i.e., estrogen).

For instance, estrogen promotes rapid, breast-cell growth in women. Tofu and soybeans contain isoflavones, weaker estrogens than those produced by the human body. These soy-derived, weaker estrogens compete with the body's stronger estrogens for cell access. So,

when the body's cells bind to the weaker estrogens, it prompts a much weaker signal for cell division that theoretically leads to less chance of tumors becoming cancerous.

As an aside, this is why women are at an increased risk of breast cancer if they began menstruating at an early age or experienced a late menopause — their bodies have endured more lifetime exposure to estrogen.

For those individuals who want to increase their odds of beating the cancer, the American Cancer Society said the first step is to quit smoking.

For nonsmokers, the most beneficial lifestyle changes include improving your dietary intake and increasing your daily physical activity. By following the Food Guide Pyramid, limiting red meats and other high-fat foods, and selecting from a wide variety of colorful fruits and vegetables, you can do your part to protect your body from developing cancer in the future.

Diets that are high in fat have been scientifically associated with an increased risk of colon, rectal, prostate and endometrial cancers. An association also exists, albeit weaker, between high-fat diets and breast cancer.

The seven most common cancers, according to the American Cancer Society, are breast, colorectal, endometrial, lung, oral and esophageal, prostate and stomach. Breast cancer is the leading type of cancer cases among American women. Lung cancer is the



On target: Doctors and nutritionists believe that foods like strawberries, oranges, tomatoes and broccoli have a positive effect in the war against cancer.

leading cause of cancer-related deaths among Americans of both genders, with colorectal cancers taking second in that category.

Regular physical exercise, which means moderate to high aerobic activity for at least 30 minutes most days of the week, can help reduce the risk of certain types of cancer through various physiological mechanisms.

For instance, exercise speeds up digestion, which decreases the amount of time that the lining is exposed to harmful substances in the material being expelled.

Stocking the family medicine cabinet

BY RENÉE SKOGLUND
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When stocking your medicine cabinet, consider the needs of both your household and your guests, including grandchildren, says Ann Laginess, a staff clinical pharmacist at Henry Ford Hospital.

Do not keep medications beyond their expiration date and throw out prescriptions that are no longer needed.

Keep all medicines in their original containers, which indicate dosage and expiration date, and store them in a cool, dry, dark place out of children's reach. "A humid, small bathroom is not the place. Neither is the top of the refrigerator," says Laginess.

Laginess compiled a list of medications and supplies — some by trademark brands — that every family should keep on hand.

Topical medications

■ Triple antibiotic ointment, such as Neosporin or Mycitracin with added pain reliever. Neosporin also comes in convenient packets.

■ Bacitracin — Good antiseptic spray for first-aid kit.

■ Afterbite — Neutralizes insect bite venom.

■ Hydrocortisone cream — Relieves itching from insect bites and skin irritations.

■ Calamine lotion — Dries and relieves itching. "When kids see the pink medication, they think it's working," said Laginess.

■ Bug spray (keep extra in your golf bag).

■ Sun block, including one for the lips.

■ Aloe cream or gel.

Supplies

■ Band-Aids — All sizes, including large for knees and elbows.

■ Cotton balls and tissue.

■ Hot water bottle — Great for back strains and tired feet.

■ Adhesive tape.

■ Safety pins, tweezers and scissors.

■ Alcohol wipes.

■ Thermometer.

■ Elastic bandage.

■ Flashlight and moleskin — Great for camping kit.

■ First-aid kit — Keep outside when entertaining guests on your patio.

■ First-aid book.

Oral medications

■ Tylenol — Headaches, sunburn, fever and flu.

■ Ibuprofen (such as Motrin) — "Good for fever in children who don't respond to other things." Anti-inflammatory for back strain and sports injuries.

■ Aspirin — "Do not use in children or teens with the flu or chicken pox." Recommended for heart attack victims waiting for the ambulance.

■ Benedril — Relieves itching of insect bites or poison ivy. Stock the liquid and 25 mg. tablets.

■ Chloritrimeton — Antihistamine not as drowsy-inducing as Benedril. If allergic to dogs or cats, take one-half hour before exposure.

■ Kaopectate — Grabs on to toxins, but does not impede elimination. Good for kids and adults.

■ Immodium — Stops diarrhea. Causes the gut to slow down and quit eliminating. Best for adults. Keep in a travel kit.

Special needs

■ Cough medicine — Keep things simple. If it's just a cough, buy something with just the "DM" ingredient. Stock both a daytime and nighttime Triaminic.

■ Syrup of Ipecac — "Never give without the instruction of the Poison Control Center. Some medications cause as much trouble coming up and going down."

■ An extra-strength antacid with an anti-gas ingredient.

■ Sore throat spray and anesthetic lozenges.

■ Electrolyte replacement solution for children and Gatorade for teens. Prevents dehydration when ill.

■ Epinephrine injections — Used for people allergic to bee stings. Comes in a pen that can be jammed into the leg. "It could save your life."

■ Mylicon — Anti-gas drops for gassy babies.

Warning: Keep the number of the Poison Control Center at Children's Hospital in Detroit posted near your phone (1-800-POISON 1, or 1-800-764-7661) and know the weight of your children or grandchildren. Antidote dosages are determined by weight.



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