

# Breast Cancer Awareness

## Foods that may help fight cancer



People concerned about their cancer risk may find that switching their diets can do a world of good. Certain foods may reduce cancer risk, according to various cancer experts, including the MD Anderson Cancer Center. In addition, some foods might increase a person's risk of developing cancer. Knowing what to put on the table come breakfast, lunch and dinner can go a long way toward reducing one's cancer risk.

Some foods show cancer-fighting properties, although it is impossible to currently say one food or another

can actually stop cancer from developing. Studies have shown that diets filled with colorful fruits and vegetables can reduce the risk of developing cancer, heart disease and diabetes. Cancer Research UK points out that some foods, such as red meat and salt-preserved foods, can increase a person's risk of developing some cancers, while vegetables, fruits and foods high in fiber have the opposite effect.

A comprehensive review of thousands of studies on physical activity, diet and weight conducted for the World Cancer Research Fund

and the American Institute for Cancer Research found that plant-based foods are the best at fighting cancer. Broccoli, berries and garlic showed some of the strongest tendencies to prevent cancer. According to research associates at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, a variety of chemicals from plants known as phytochemicals protect cells from harmful compounds in food and in the environment. Phytochemicals prevent cell damage and mutations.

When making their grocery lists, people who want to eat healthy and lower their cancer

risk can include as many of these foods as possible.

- **Garlic:** Studies suggest that garlic can reduce the incidence of stomach cancer by attacking bacteria associated with some ulcers and belly cancers. Sulfur compounds in the food may stimulate the immune system's natural defenses against cancer and could reduce inflammation and tumor growth.

- **Broccoli:** Broccoli and other cruciferous vegetables like cauliflower, cabbage and kale contain glucosinolates. These are phytochemicals that produce protective enzymes that activate in the intestines. One particular compound, sulforaphane, is strongest and found in broccoli. Protective properties are highest in raw or steamed broccoli.

- **Blueberries:** Blueberries are loaded with antioxidants. Antioxidants neutralize the unstable compounds, called free radicals, that can damage cells and lead to cancer.

- **Tomatoes:** The red, rich coloring of tomatoes comes from lycopene. In laboratory tests, lycopene has stopped cancer cells, including breast, lung, and endometrial cancers, from growing. Researchers speculate that lycopene protects cells from damage that could lead to cancer by boosting the immune system.

## What research says about cannabis and cancer



Attitudes about marijuana are changing. Such changes are reflected in legislation that has legalized marijuana in many areas and, in some instances, unofficially decriminalized possession of small amounts of marijuana in other places.

Shifting attitudes about marijuana, also known as cannabis, may be attributed to various factors, including medical research. Though research studying the effects of marijuana on recovering cancer patients is ongoing, cancer patients and their families may be curious about the potential for cannabis to assist in their recoveries.

### WHAT IS MARIJUANA?

Marijuana is a plant that originated in central Asia but is now grown in many parts of the world. According to the National Cancer Institute, the cannabis plant produces a resin that contains compounds known as "cannabinoids," which are active chemicals that, when ingested, affect various parts of the human body, including the central nervous system and the immune system. One active cannabinoid is cannabidiol, or CBD, which the NCI notes may relieve pain and inflammation without making users feel the "high" that other cannabinoids produce.

### WHAT ARE SOME OTHER POTENTIAL EFFECTS OF CANNABINOIDS?

The NCI notes that research has shown that cannabinoids may be able to do more than relieve cancer patients' pain and inflammation. While

additional research is necessary, the NCI says cannabinoids may be able to block cell growth. The NCI points to studies in mice and rats that have shown that cannabinoids may inhibit tumor growth by causing cell death, blocking cell growth and blocking the development of blood vessels that tumors need to grow. Cancer is marked by the uncontrolled division of abnormal cells, so the potential for cannabinoids to block that growth is a significant benefit. In addition, the NCI cites laboratory and animal studies that have shown that cannabinoids may be able to kill cancer cells while protecting normal cells.

### HAVE CANNABINOIDS BEEN LINKED TO PARTICULAR CANCERS?

Studies have shown that cannabinoids may have an effect on various types of cancer, including breast cancer and liver cancer. The NCI notes that a laboratory study of delta-9-THC, the main active cannabinoid in marijuana, in liver cancer cells indicated that the cannabinoid damaged or killed the cancer cells. Another laboratory study of CBD in estrogen receptor positive and estrogen receptor negative breast cancer cells showed that CBD caused cancer cell death while having little effect on normal breast cells.

Societal attitudes about marijuana are shifting, and ongoing research regarding its potential benefits in treating cancer may be changing the way the medical community views marijuana as well.

## Breast cancer survival rates soar

A breast cancer diagnosis can be a devastating blow. Upon receiving such a diagnosis, people may begin to ask questions about treatment and the impact cancer may have on their personal lives. Many people who are diagnosed with cancer also begin to wonder about their mortality.

An estimated 266,120 new cases of invasive breast cancer and 63,960 new cases of non-invasive, or in situ, breast cancer are expected to be diagnosed among women in the United States this year, according to Breastcancer.org. According to the latest statistics presented by the Canadian Breast Cancer foundation, 26,300 women and 230 men had been diagnosed with breast cancer in Canada in 2017.

The good news is that breast cancer incidence rates began decreasing in 2000 after increasing for the previous two decades. In addition, death rates from breast cancer have been decreasing steadily since 1989.

The National Cancer Institute says that the change in age-adjusted mortality rates are an indicator of the progress being made in the fight against breast cancer. The most recent SEER Cancer Statistics Review released in April 2018 indicates cancer death rates among wom-

en decreased by 1.4 percent per year between the years of 2006 and 2015. The American Cancer Society says that decreasing death rates among major cancer types, including prostate, colorectal, lung, and breast cancers, are driving the overall shift in survival. The ACS says breast cancer death rates among women declined by 39 percent from 1989 to 2015. That progress is attributed to improvements in early detection and treatment protocols. For anyone doing the math, over the last 25 years or so, 322,000 lives have been saved from breast cancer.

A similar scenario has unfolded in Canada. Breast cancer mortality rates in Canada recently decreased to 21.4 percent, down from 21.8 percent in 2011, states data from the Canadian Cancer Society. Currently, the five-year survival rate for breast cancer among Canadians is 87 percent, and the five-year net survival in the United States is 85 percent.

Increased knowledge about breast cancer, early detection through examinations and mammography and improved treatments are helping to drive up the survival rates of breast cancer. Although this does not make diagnosis any less scary, it does offer hope to those recently diagnosed.



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