High Fiber = Low Risk

The American Institute for Cancer Research and the World Cancer Research Fund recently published a report of the role of fiber in preventing several types of cancer, especially colorectal cancer. They estimate that approximately 45% of colorectal cancer cases could be prevented if we all ate more fiber-rich plant foods and less meat, drank less alcohol, moved more and stayed lean.

Fiber is found in fruits, vegetables, beans and grains. The recommended daily intake is 20 – 35 grams of fiber per day. Some examples include Wheat Bran Cereal (8 grams/ounce), Fig Bars (2 grams/3 bars), Orange (3.1 grams), Broccoli (2.3 grams/1/2 cup), Kidney Beans (8.2 grams/1/2 cup), and Whole Wheat Bread (2 grams/1 slice). Check your food labels for more information. Fiber from foods is better than supplements. Try adding fruit to your cereal, choosing whole grain breads, pasta and rice whenever possible, or add oatmeal or crushed bran cereal to other foods such as meatloaf.

Red meats such as beef, pork and lamb should be reduced to no more than 18 ounces per week; which is about 5-6 small portions. Processed meats such as ham, bacon, pastrami, salami, hot dogs and sausages should be avoided as much as possible. Studies showed that eating 3.5 ounces of processed meats per day increased the risk of cancer by 36%.

The American Institute for Cancer Research suggests planning meals with 2/3 (or more) of the plate containing vegetables, fruits, whole grains, beans and nuts. The remaining 1/3 (or less) of the plate could provide animal protein such as poultry, seafood, cheese, yogurt and lean red meat.

Eating high nutrient quality foods with less overall calories and moving more promotes healthy weight maintenance. Obesity is linked to several forms of cancer risk so preventing or reducing overweight reduces risk.

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Resources:
The American Institute for Cancer Research Newsletter, Summer 2011 and website www.aicr.org

Wheat Foods Council “Fiber, Get your fill” and website www.wheatfoods.org
Diet Concerns During Cancer Treatment

Depending on the type, location and treatment of cancer, eating and drinking adequately can become big challenges!

- Keeping meals simple and soft make them easier to swallow and digest.
- Cold foods can be less aromatic for those sensitive to smells.
- Increasing the quantity of calories per mouthful is usually necessary – this means that a little extra fat and or adding protein powder such as non fat dry milk are acceptable.
- Flavors may be altered to taste metallic or acidic – use plastic utensils if necessary.
- Offering small amounts of food or drink frequently throughout the day is helpful to decrease stress and increase overall intake.
- Sometimes a temporary feeding tube is helpful to ensure adequate intake and maintenance of body strength for recovery. The tube can be removed after treatment.

A Neutropenic diet is used when patients have a weakened immune system due to chemotherapy and/or transplant. Basically, this diet avoids all foods which might carry a risk of food borne illness such as meat, fish or poultry cooked from a raw state; cold meat or poultry such as deli meats, pickled fish, eggs, yogurt, ice cream or yogurt from a soft-serve machine; cold brewed tea; unpasteurized dairy products; milk shakes made in a blender; prepared salads, deli meats or cheeses; soft cheeses (i.e. Brie, feta); cheese with mold (i.e. Bleu, Gorgonzola); unrefrigerated cream filled doughnuts or pastries; raw or roasted in shell nuts; Fresh fruits and vegetables (except thick skinned fruits when washed and peeled such as apples, bananas, melon, grapefruit and oranges); stir-fried vegetables; cold soups; or fresh salad dressings.

In general, prepared frozen or canned foods are considered safe to eat due to their extensive processing. Foods which have been cooked very thoroughly and that have been handled with known safe techniques (i.e. thoroughly cooked vegetables from your garden) could also be considered safe.

Caregivers and patients should pay particular attention to food safety by washing hands thoroughly before touching any food for preparation and again before serving or eating. All foods should be cooked to a minimum temperature of 165 degrees before serving.

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