



Foods That Fight Cancer

Strong Food Therapy is Fundamental to Victory Over Cancer

By Dr. Francisco Contreras, MD

Unless you have been living in a bubble for the last twenty years, you know there is a strong connection between the foods we eat and chronic degenerative diseases. The great news is that there are also foods that rebuild a healthy body. The China Study has been of particular interest to me because it singles out the foods that are absolutely linked to an increased risk for cancer. The China Study, conducted by Cornell University, is an ongoing study that has spanned a period of over 20 years in rural China.

The participants in this study ate a diet that was primarily plant-based. Guess what? The study showed that risk for most cancers correlated with the proportion of dietary calories provided by animal products.

So, what exactly are animal proteins, animal fats, processed foods, processed sugars, and white flour doing that increases the risk for cancer? A diet based largely on these staples of a “western” diet boosts our production of two important hormones: insulin and “free” insulin-like growth factor-I, or IGF-I. At the Oasis of Hope, we have carefully examined the science that links the levels of these hormones in the bloodstream to the rapid multiplication of mutated cells.^{1,2} The connection is clear.

Foods that increase the levels of insulin and free IGF-I in the bloodstream will ultimately stimulate cancer’s progress. Insulin and free IGF-I even are involved in the defense mechanism cancer uses to protect itself against the toxic effects of chemotherapy.³ Conversely, a diet that keeps the levels of insulin and IGF-I low will ultimately inhibit the progression of cancer. It really is that simple.

The ideal diet is primarily plant-based. Only 15% of the calories in a person’s diet should come from fats. In addition, because carbohydrates with a high-glycemic index can boost insulin levels, the diet should provide carbohydrates from sources that are low in glycemic index. Even carrot juice has quite a bit of natural sugar. Instead, we recommend green vegetable juices or vegetable juice that is no more than two thirds carrot juice.

Ideally, it is desirable for patients to adopt a vegan, or wholly plant-based diet, with the one exception of fish oil. The omega-3 fatty acids in clean fish oil present numerous benefits and the fish oil does not increase insulin levels. A vegan diet is low-fat and moderate in protein. The vegan diet incorporates whole-food carbohydrate sources that are low on the glycemic index, such as pastas, whole fruits, and whole-grain products like sprouted wheat breads instead of wheat-flour breads. I have long been a fan of the Hallelujah Diet precisely because it celebrates foods with a low glycemic

index and rich in fiber content.

In addition to these dietary changes, there are a host of foods that offer a range of benefits to cancer patients. Certain vegetables like cabbage, broccoli, cauliflower, kale, onions, and garlic contain compounds that cause the body's cells to produce higher levels of antioxidants as well as enzymes which detoxify the body.^{4,5} This is especially important for cancer patients that opt for conventional therapies because consuming these foods can increase the ability of healthy tissues to cope with chemotherapeutic drugs and radiotherapy. They may also present post-treatment benefits by helping to block the development of additional cancers. They certainly don't hurt the body at all. Oasis of Hope patients consume plenty of these foods because they help the body heal. It is important for anyone managing chronic illness to view dietary changes in a positive light. Giving up "comfort foods" is a small price to pay in order to halt the growth and spread of cancer.

Another food with particular promise for cancer patients is spirulina. Spirulina is a food supplement produced primarily from two species of blue-green algae. Research shows that spirulina contains a phytonutrient that blocks a signal pathway that makes cancer cells more aggressive and that protects them from programmed cell death.⁶⁻⁸ In addition, spirulina contains polysaccharides that boost the ability of the natural killer cells of the immune system to block metastasis.⁹

Some of this information may be a bit technical but the point is that a strong food therapy is fundamental to victory over cancer. The dining commons at Oasis of Hope Hospital are as important as our surgery suites when it comes to treatment.

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Updated February 29, 2012