

- Avoid or limit alcohol
- Avoid or limit highly refined, highly processed foods

- Limit foods high in sugar, including sweets, cakes and sugary drinks
- Limit foods that are high in salt
- Limit foods that are high in animal fats
- Avoid or limit cured meats such as bacon, ham and sausages

Focus instead on:

- Eating lots of fresh vegetables and fruits every day
- Enjoying lean animal protein such as chicken breast and fish
- Including more plant-based foods high in protein such as beans, lentils, peas, chickpeas, quinoa and soy-based foods
- Choosing whole-grain options such as brown bread, brown rice and wholewheat pasta
- Increasing your intake of nuts and seeds
- Focusing on sources of healthy fats such as olive oil, avocados and fatty fish like sardines

Tips for bypassing the typical nutritional roadblocks

Omy Naidoo says, “Cancer patients undergoing treatment often experience a severe loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, as well as dysgeusia which is taste alterations. Very often these patients need high protein, vitamin-containing supplements which they drink 2-3 times per day. Some patients need tailored diets to help them get through spells of nausea and vomiting, and this is exactly how your dietitian can help you. It’s important to remember that cancer patients need more nutrition, however, they typically end up taking in much less than usual due to these symptoms. The net effect of this is that patients can lose muscle mass and become malnourished. This is precisely what you want to avoid as malnutrition then becomes an independent risk factor for poorer outcomes.”

If you or a loved one are dealing with these challenges, then you need to reset your daily nutritional regime:

- Focus on smaller, lighter meals eaten more frequently than the standard three meals a day
- Experiment with healthy snack foods that are always on hand such as wholewheat crackers, nuts, seeds, fruits and vegetables
- Try out delicious nutrient-rich smoothies
- Add nuts and seeds to yoghurt, cereals, smoothies, and even casseroles
- Make frozen lolly treats from fresh fruit juices, fruit, yoghurt and smoothies
- Use nutritional supplements prescribed by your health professional

Most important is to remember that combatting malnutrition is your goal. Take action and get professional nutritional advice to help the cancer patient maintain their weight as best as possible.

Healthy nutrition also reduces your risk of cancer

While some risk factors for cancer cannot be changed, research shows that 30 to 50% of major cancers can be prevented by following a healthy lifestyle. Faaizah Laher says, “While there is no guaranteed way to prevent cancer, a healthy lifestyle can help reduce your risk of developing many cancers and positively support treatment and recovery if you are diagnosed with cancer. Think of eating the colours of a rainbow and lots of variety of nutritious foods (such as fruits and vegetables, whole grains, nuts, seeds and legumes). Along with healthy eating, an active lifestyle and maintaining a healthy weight play important roles in reducing risk and boosting your resilience.”

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