



October is National Breast Cancer Awareness Month...

In October, we enjoy the cool of autumn, the fun of family events, and the anticipation of the holiday season. During this busy and exciting time, there is much to be learned about life. October is also National Breast Cancer Awareness Month. Hence, there is no better time to reflect upon our habits and our health.

The American Cancer Society estimates that approximately 180,510 new cases of breast cancer will occur during 2007, 178,480 of which are likely to occur in women. The statistics may seem staggering, but they are not yet set in stone. There are many ways that each of us can take health into our own hands and lower this statistic one by one.

From a nutritional approach, every food that we eat has a pro-inflammatory or anti-inflammatory effect that will increase or decrease risk of diseases such as cancer. When you look at your dinner plate this evening, think of placing each food on a scale. One side would contain the pro-inflammatory foods such as red meats and meats that are “charred” or “smoked” during cooking, processed meats, high-fat/processed cheeses, refined starches and sugars, and other foods high in saturated fats. The other side of the scale would contain low-fat, high fiber foods such as colorful fruits and vegetables, along with lean meats and whole grains. Would your scale tip in favor of a healthy immune system, decreased risk of cancer, and overall good health?

Foods do not necessarily “cause” or “cure” cancer. However, foods definitely contribute to both risk and prevention. Although complete avoidance of pro-inflammatory foods may not be necessary, tipping your scale toward the “low-fat, high-fiber, lots-of-color” side has definite health benefits. For example, eating a hamburger with French fries and a sugary dessert would have a completely different effect on the body than having that same hamburger on a whole-grain roll with roasted vegetables and cinnamon-sprinkled fruit. Often we think of this scenario played out in our bodies in terms of weight. However, this scenario affects our health right down to the tiniest parts of every cell, including how efficiently each cell functions, repairs itself, and defends itself from harmful substances. The nutrients found in whole foods (even “phytonutrients” found in the pigments that give foods color) have health benefits far beyond basic energy needs. We so often hear the words “balance,” and “moderation,” and they are truly words of wisdom.

Current recommendations to prevent cancer or the reoccurrence of cancer focus on four main areas:

1. Food. Choose foods most often that are high in fiber, low in fat, and full of nutrients. Eat at least five cups of fruits or vegetables per day. Limit fat, and

- choose unsaturated fats (oils, omega-3's) over saturated and trans fats. Include a variety of colors and flavors for added benefits. Even herbs and spices contribute to overall health.
2. Exercise. Current government exercise guidelines recommend at least 30 minutes of physical activity per day. The number increases to 60 minutes per day to prevent weight gain, and 90 minutes per day to promote weight loss.
  3. Weight. Maintaining a healthy weight can significantly decrease complications with cancer. A study in the *New England Journal of Medicine* (Vol. 348, No. 17: 1626 – 1638) suggested that obesity may account for as many as 20% of all cancer deaths in US women. That is even more reason to eat healthy and exercise!
  4. Stress. Stress reduction is thought to improve the immune system and possibly decrease risk of breast cancer. During National Breast Cancer Awareness Month, don't forget to learn words to a new song, call a friend, or set aside time to read a good book!

This October, here's to healthy bodies. Women, take care of yourselves. You are worth it!

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