

The Link Between Diet and Cancer

What do we know about the link between diet and cancer? Experts review over 30 years of research.

The information published about diet and chronic diseases like cancer can be baffling. There are so many studies, so much information, and the media reports something “new and exciting” almost daily. It can become confusing to filter through the information and tease out the good from the not-so-good facts.

So what do we know about the link between diet and cancer? Recently, experts reviewed over 30-years of research and provided a summary of the most conclusive evidence we had to-date.

In attempting to summarize and provide sound recommendations, scientific experts reviewed the enormous body of research on diet and a variety of cancers including: oral, esophageal, stomach, pancreatic, lung, breast, cervical, prostate, kidney, and others. They reviewed different types of research from large population studies to smaller clinical trials and newer genetic research.

The good news: we know for certain that obesity increases risk, lots of fruits and vegetables decrease risk, and alcohol consumption increases risk of certain cancers, like breast cancer.

The less-good news: we don't have a lot of other *firm* evidence on the specific links between diet and particular cancers, and therefore, much research still needs to be done.

Diet is thought to play a role in about 20%-30% of all cancers worldwide. That makes diet, therefore, the #2 potentially preventable cause of most cancers. The #1 preventable cause of cancer is tobacco use.

The experts concluded that based on what we knew as of recent, the most important advice to follow is to maintain a healthy weight, limit alcohol intake, and eat a varied, balanced diet especially rich in fruits, vegetables, and grains.

References:

Key TJ, Allen NE, Spencer EA, Travis RC. (2002). The effect of diet on risk of cancer. *The Lancet*, 360: 861-868.