



Caregiver

— ADVOCACY GROUP —
Caring your loved ones

Cancer

CAREGIVER

“SUPPORTING YOUR LOVED ONES THROUGH THEIR JOURNEY”



ON CANCER NUTRITION



MYTHS, FACTS AND BEST PRACTICES IN CANCER NUTRITION

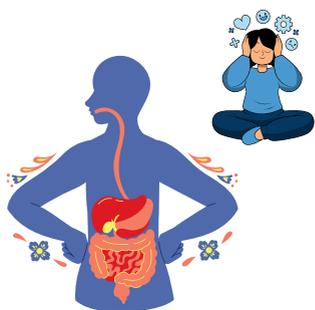
DR. MEENAKSHI BAJAJ,
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Dr. Meenakshi Bajaj emphasized the importance of tailored dietary plans to manage the side effects of cancer treatments. She provided practical advice on what foods to be included or avoided, focusing on easily digestible options, adequate hydration, and the need for balanced nutrition during treatment. She emphasized that optimal nutrition is essential for cancer patients, especially those undergoing radiation or surgery that may impair consumption or digestion. Malnutrition can delay healing, so maintaining a balanced diet is critical to meet caloric and protein needs to improve quality of life.

Key Dietary Recommendations

1. Managing Oral and Digestive Issues



Difficulty Swallowing (Dysphagia): For head and neck cancer patients, a speech therapist can help assess swallowing challenges and recommend appropriate consistency of the diet to be consumed

Reflux and Chest Pain: A bland, easily digestible diet is essential, avoiding spicy, acidic, or hot foods. Recommended meals include idli, idiyappam, pongal, lentil rice, and non-spicy sambar. Small, frequent meals are advised, with early dinners to prevent gastro esophageal reflux. Citrus juices should be avoided due to their potential to trigger reflux

Diarrhea: For diarrhea, patients should eat small, bland meals like rice with yogurt, boiled mashed potatoes, or rice porridge. Hydration is key, with coconut water, buttermilk, or ORS solutions (under medical guidance) being ideal. Avoid heavy, hard-to-digest foods like greens, oats, wheat, non-vegetarian and fried foods during diarrhea episodes. Boiled, cooled water to drink, easy-to-digest foods like idly, idiyappam, appam, sago porridge, curd rice, and tender coconut water are recommended during diarrhea episodes. For snacks, apples without skin can be a suitable choice. The emphasis is on eating safe, hygienic easy-to-digest foods in small portions throughout the day to manage symptoms effectively.

2. Managing Nausea and Vomiting

When experiencing nausea, it is essential to avoid spicy, oily, or heavy foods and opt for lighter, easily digestible options. Clear vegetable soups, fennel or cardamom tea, and ajwain-infused water can aid digestion and soothe the stomach. Home made drinks like lemon tea with honey or pineapple lemon juice are recommended over store-bought versions for better taste and digestive benefits. To enhance flavors without irritating the stomach, fresh herbs such as coriander, curry leaves, and mint can be added to dishes like rasam and buttermilk. Buttermilk can be made more palatable by adding chopped cucumber, coriander, mint, and a small amount of ginger. Variations like mint or coriander rice with chutney can also help change the flavor. For better food tolerance, it's helpful to track foods that trigger nausea with a food diary and modify diet based on individual tolerances. This can help identify and avoid foods that worsen nausea. Light, small, frequent easy-to-digest foods like bananas, apples, rice with lentils, and toast are ideal. For liquids, coconut water, millet porridge can provide nutritional value without being too heavy. It's important to avoid foods like Pongal and instead choose lighter options such as idly, idiyappam, or kanji. Monitoring sodium and potassium levels is the key to prevent electrolyte imbalances like hyponatremia.



3. Diabetes Management



- Choose Mosambi juice, guava juice, tender coconut water only when nausea, vomiting and diarrhea are persistent
- Follow a balanced diet and prescribed insulin routine.

4. Radiation Therapy & Mouth Sores:

Patients can meet calorie needs with easy-to-tolerate energy and nutrient dense foods including nuts, roasted millets flours, dals, rice, wheat, oats combined to prepare porridge mixes, food tolerance varies based on the side effects & symptoms of RT & should be individualized accordingly.

- Hydration and electrolyte status to be monitored and managed effectively in cases of vomiting or diarrhea
- Prefer tender coconut water, buttermilk, clear soups, rice porridges in such situation.
- Fermented rice overnight, add curd and salt to support digestion and gut health.
- Use partially hydrolyzed guar gum mixed with curds for prebiotic benefits

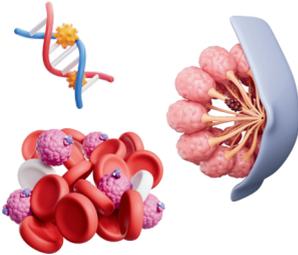


5. Immune Support



To support immunity, it's crucial to consume foods rich in vitamins, particularly vitamin C. Amla (Indian gooseberry) is highlighted as a great source of vitamin C. Guava, basil leaves, and drumstick leaves are also recommended for their high nutritional content, including vitamins A, C, and E. However, people with mouth ulcers or gastrointestinal issues should be cautious with citrus fruits. Nuts, such as almonds and walnuts (soaked overnight) are beneficial for their omega-3 fatty acids and zinc, which boost immunity. For those with specific health conditions like diabetes or heart issues, almonds and walnuts are the best options. If protein is needed, eggs are suggested as a high-quality protein source, but raw eggs mixed with milk should be avoided due to the risk of salmonella and complications with conditions like diarrhea. For those dealing with gastrointestinal issues like diarrhea, it is suggested to go low residue and lactose free. Maintaining gut health, balancing essential nutrients, and avoiding practices like consuming raw eggs are all emphasized for improving overall health and immunity. Foods rich in vitamin C (e.g., tomatoes, drumsticks, guava) and selenium (e.g., mushrooms) are recommended to boost immunity, particularly when platelet counts are low.

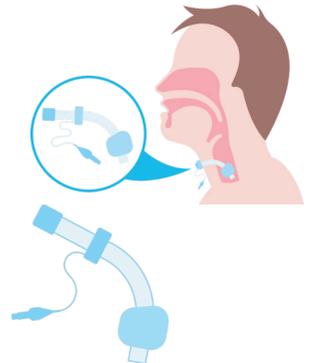
6. Dietary Needs for Different Cancers:



- Few Gastrointestinal cancers : Specialized feeding methods like post-pyloric feeding, or Total Parenteral Nutrition (TPN) may be required.
- Ewing sarcoma (especially in children): Nutrient-dense specific scientific formulas can help supplement oral intake

7. Feeding Tube and Stoma Care:

- For patients with feeding tubes or stomas, use nutrients specific – scientific formulas or homemade, filtered, room-temperature liquids like milk, buttermilk, or fruit juices. (in case of ostomy bags low residue lactose free ,gluten free feeds are suggested).
- Avoid beverages like tea or coffee and ensure safety by not using raw egg mixtures in tube feeding.
- Oral nutrition supplements should be included for adequate calorie and protein intake.
- Recipes like boiled milk with eggs, sweetened with cardamom or vanilla, can be fed through the tube, while avoiding raw egg mixtures. Additionally, oral nutrition supplements should be included for adequate calorie and protein intake.
- Maintaining proper nutrition, hydration, and safe feeding techniques is essential to support healing and improve recovery chances in cancer patients



8. Tube Feeding



- After each bolus feed, patients should flush the feeding tube with 5-10 ml of water to maintain hygiene.
- A 10ml of drinking soda to flush every two days can help clear the tube at home or pancreatic enzyme tablets, especially when feeding oily or milk-based foods, to prevent diarrhea or vomiting.

- For patients with a colostomy bag, staying well-hydrated and eating small, frequent meals is essential.
- Foods like yam, tapioca, sago, bread, rice, potatoes, bananas, and apples can help thicken stool output.
- Prefer split green gram dhal to toor dhal, whole grams for improved tolerance and hydrate well. Chewing foods well is essential.
- Avoid foods that cause discomfort or excessive gas, such as cabbage, cauliflower, broccoli, garlic, onions, nuts, and seeds.
- Avoid foods like wheat, greens, oats, barley, and milk (start with lactose-free options). Fermented foods like yogurt or buttermilk are preferred.

9. Ostomy Foods



General Dietary Recommendations

- Best dietary advice is when it is customised/personalised by a qualified registered dietician.
- In nausea, prefer small and frequent meals rather than large portion sizes. Some people feel better with honey, few basil leaves and, mint leaves or mix of ginger juice and honey.
- Always prefer home cooked foods, traditional, seasonal, local fruits and vegetables to expensive and exotic foods.
- In PWD (persons with diabetes) when unable to consume solid or semi solid diet, citrus fruit juices without sugar, milk, buttermilk, homemade soups, multigrain porridges and glycemic friendly nutritional supplements can be given to meet the nutritional requirement.
- In under nourished individuals without diabetes, homemade desserts and milkshakes (sweet Pongal, kesari, carrot halwa, pal khoa, banana milkshake, Rava Ladoo can be given occasionally in small portions) can be given based on tolerance. These may help improve nutrition



Nutrition for Health & Recovery

- Hydration and careful food choices are essential for managing symptoms and improving health.
- Wound healing requires a variety of nutrients, so patients need to focus on balanced nutrition, plenty of local, seasonal, traditional fruits and vegetables.
- Protein supplements are generally safe as prescribed by qualified Dietician unless the patient has renal issues in which case renal-specific protein supplements should be used.
- Type of Dietary /Nutritional supplements have to be consumed based on nutritional status ,site ,stage and management strategy of the cancer.
- Specialized nutrition supplements are important for patients with dysphagia or those on tube feeding to meet their nutritional needs, especially if they've lost substantial weight and intake is compromised.



Budget-Friendly & Accessible Options

- Some budget-friendly options include ragi, pulses, rice, dhal, eggs, whole grams, moringa, and milk.
- Some hospitals receive philanthropic donations for nutrition support

Mental Health & Support

- Depression can affect appetite and nutritional status.
- Mental health support and counseling about the importance of nutrition can help encourage patients to eat.



Lifestyle & Disease Prevention

- Patients are encouraged to eat traditional, local, and seasonal foods. Focus on plant based diet and home cooked foods.
- The prevention of cancers, like breast and colon cancer, can be linked to maintaining a healthy lifestyle, such as controlling blood glucose, avoiding obesity, and steering clear of fried snacks, reheated oil, processed foods, and red meat.
- Consuming plenty of fruits, vegetables, wholegrains, healthy diet and physical activity are keys to good health and long life.

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