

Prostate Cancer Prevention Part 2: Vegetables and Fruits

by Ann Gerhardt, MD

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Unlike the controversy surrounding diet and breast cancer, at least one dietary nutrient has proven prostate cancer preventive activity. **Lycopene, abundant in tomatoes, prevents prostate cancer.** Men with higher lycopene levels are less likely to develop prostate cancer, and, if it does start, they get less aggressive forms.

Processing tomatoes by cooking or adding fat releases lycopene for better absorption by the human gut. Therefore pasta sauce and even ketchup are better than a raw tomato. Watermelon, apricots, guava and pink grapefruit also contain lycopene. Be careful, though, to gorge on the pasta sauce, not the pasta, to keep from gaining weight. Obesity definitely increases cancer risk.

There is much less information concerning other fruits and vegetables. Cruciferous (also called Brassica) vegetables such as broccoli, kale, mustard and collard greens, bok choy, cauliflower, cabbage and brussels sprouts contain healthy, natural chemicals, which prevent cancer in animals. **The jury is still out on whether these vegetables prevent prostate cancer, but studies showing benefit seem to have a slight edge.**

A long-term study of men eating at least 5 servings of cruciferous vegetables a week (how they found a significant number of men doing that, I don't know) demonstrated a 20% reduction in prostate cancer. The cancer rate in another group of men was unaffected by total vegetable and fruit intake, but those eating more cruciferous vegetables had less aggressive cancer.

We have less information about other vegetable and fruit types, but some of it is positive. Seattle males aged 40-64 who ate three or more servings of vegetables a day (only 15% of those sampled) were half as likely to have prostate cancer. Four cruciferous vegetable servings per week protected just as much. Contrary to other research, cooked tomatoes conferred no benefit in these younger men. It's possible that initiation and propagation of prostate cancer in middle-aged men with more testosterone is a different process than in really old men.

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HEALTHY CHOICES FOR MIND AND BODY

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Of fourteen thousand Seventh Day Adventist vegetarian men, those who ate more beans, lentils, peas, tomatoes, raisins, dates and dried fruit developed prostate cancer at much lower rates, but they also drink less alcohol and don't smoke. A multi-ethnic study in western U.S. and Canada found a protective effect of legumes, equally for soy and other bean types. Chinese men who eat more allium-containing vegetables, like garlic, scallions, onions and leeks, develop less prostate cancer.

Phenethyl isothiocyanate, (PEIT), a **constituent of edible cruciferous vegetables sensitizes prostate cancer cells to treatment with docetaxel (Taxotere), the one approved treatment for castrate resistant prostate cancer.** PEIT suppresses cancer cell growth and induces cell death in test tube and animal experiments. We await a randomized trial of Taxotere with and without cruciferous vegetables.



For those who want a pill to make up for their crappy diet, forget it. Individual vitamin A, thiamin (B1), riboflavin (B2), niacin (B3), vitamin C, selenium, calcium potassium, phosphorus, iron, zinc and fiber supplements won't work. ¶