

Nutrition

Overview

Maintaining a healthy diet is important for everyone, but is especially important for patients who are undergoing treatment for lymphoma for many reasons. While there is no specific diet for lymphoma patients, staying hydrated and eating a balanced diet of fruits and vegetables, protein, and carbohydrates can help:

- Maintain strength
- Increase energy
- Improve healing ability; boost immune system
- Maintain a healthy weight
- Decrease risk of infections
- Allow faster recovery from treatments
- Minimize side effects of treatment

Patients undergoing chemotherapy have a high risk of feeling ill or getting an infection and experiencing side effects, some of which can be severe. All of this can make eating and drinking difficult. A healthy diet is essential for helping the body heal from the lymphoma and its recommended treatments. A registered dietitian can customize a meal and snack plan to meet your nutritional needs and help you modify the plan as needed.

Fruits and Vegetables

The fiber, vitamins, minerals and other bioactive food components in fruits and vegetables are essential for healthy cell functioning. Many fruits and vegetables contain antioxidants, which help the body fight infection or disease, including cancer. Fruits and vegetables should be washed properly to prevent food-borne illness, which healthy adults can fight, but could cause serious illness in patients undergoing chemotherapy.

Protein

Lean meats, eggs, nuts, beans, and dairy are all good sources of protein, which can help the body fight infection, build strength, maintain energy, and promote healing.

Carbohydrates

Complex carbohydrates like whole grains boost the body's energy supply by supplying B vitamins which can provide long-lasting energy. They also contain trace minerals and antioxidants, which can help the cells of the body function properly and fight infection.

Dairy Products

Dairy products, such as milk, cheese (see information about avoiding soft cheeses below), and yogurt are good sources of calcium, vitamins, and carbohydrates. Dairy products are also a good source of protein, which boosts the immune system to fight infection, build strength, and maintain the energy needed to function while living with lymphoma and undergoing treatment. Whole milk can help lessen the weight loss and muscle wasting (atrophy) symptoms that can occur with chemotherapy.

Snacks

Patients often have a significantly reduced appetite during chemotherapy. Snacks, such as almonds, Greek yogurt, and smoothies can help patients get the extra protein and calories needed during this time. Smoothies made with fresh fruit, whole milk, vanilla yogurt, and crushed nuts are high in calories and protein. Adding yogurt, frozen yogurt, or ice cream to beverages can also help increase calorie counts, especially when chewing and swallowing solid food are difficult.

Hydration

Dehydration can result from side effects of treatment such as diarrhea and vomiting and can be life threatening. Increasing fluid intake proportional to the amount of fluid lost can be critical. If fluids can not be kept down, small but frequent sips of water or sucking on small pieces of ice may be helpful.

Foods to Avoid During Chemotherapy Treatment

Avoiding particular foods can help ease the side effects of treatment. Unwashed raw vegetables or fruits and raw or undercooked meats, fish, or eggs can harbor bacteria. Because chemotherapy treatments and stem cell transplants often lower white blood cell counts, patients may have difficulty fighting infections that can result from bacteria. Soft cheeses are ripened by mold, so they can increase the risk of food-borne illness, which can result in vomiting and dehydration.

Wash fresh fruits and vegetables with soap, and avoid fruits and vegetables that cannot be properly scrubbed and washed like blackberries or raspberries. Also, keep the surfaces where you prepare food clean by washing with soap and water. Use a separate cutting board for raw meats or fish and for other foods, and clean

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them with soap and water or a dilute vinegar solution afterward. Deli meats, fresh-sliced from the deli counter, should be avoided by patients undergoing chemotherapy (unless reheated until steaming hot). Vacuum-packed, prepackaged deli meats are a better choice because they carry a lower risk of contamination compared with fresh-sliced deli meats. Lean cooked meats, like chicken, are an even better choice because they are a good source of protein.

Spicy foods and citrus fruits can intensify pre-existing side effects such as mouth sores. Fried foods, or those with strong smells, can also worsen symptoms like nausea, vomiting, and appetite loss. Conversely, bland foods like plain noodles with olive oil or butter, dry cereal, toast, or crackers can ease nausea. Avoid food and carbonated drinks that can cause gas as this will increase discomfort and cause a feeling of fullness. Talk to your doctor before taking nutritional or herbal supplements because some of these supplements could interfere with cancer treatments.

Some Healthy Food Choices to consider:

- Whole grain cereals and breads
- Pasteurized 100% fruit or vegetable juices. Pasteurized drinks are needed because you may be more susceptible to infection during cancer treatment
- More fruits and vegetables, and less meat
- Carrot sticks, fresh or dried fruits, or other crunchy vegetables
- Leafy green salads
- Limit the amount of sugary foods in your diet, like non diet sodas and desserts
- Choose lean meats like chicken, turkey, lean pork, and fish over red meat or processed lunch meats

During treatment, you may not feel like eating, foods may not taste good, or nausea may make eating unpleasant. In order to get enough nutrition during these times, try the following:

- Eat several small meals throughout the day rather than three large ones
- Plan to eat at certain times of the day rather than waiting until you are hungry
- Choose high-calorie, nutrient-rich foods like nuts, beans, avocados, seeds, puddings, or cooked cereals like oatmeal
- Keep your favorite foods nearby and snack often

To help ease some of the discomforts commonly associated with cancer treatments, try drinking water and eating high-fiber foods like beans, lentils, vegetables, and fresh or dried fruit to help with constipation. Bland foods like rice, bananas, and apples, and staying hydrated with plenty of water, can help with diarrhea. For mouth sores or dry mouth, try foods that are soft or mostly liquid like soup, yogurt, or milk, or puree foods to make them easier to swallow.

Resources

LRF offers a wide range of resources that address treatment options, the latest research advances, and ways to cope with all aspects of lymphoma. LRF also provides many educational activities, from in-person meetings to teleconferences and webcasts. For more information about any of these resources, visit the website at www.lymphoma.org or contact the Helpline at (800) 500-9976 or helpline@lymphoma.org.