

# Foods That Reduce Cancer Risk

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**SPRINGFIELD** (Delaware Co.) — Cancer is a dreaded word among all age groups. The older a person becomes, the more cancer is feared. The longer one lives, the greater the chance of contracting some form of cancer.

Although no guaranteed protection against cancer exists, research shows a solid link between cancer and the foods we eat or don't eat.

In fact, experts believe that 40 percent of cancers in men and 60 percent of cancers in women are partly due to what we eat.

Because the influence of diet is so substantial, the National Cancer Institute (NCI) urges people to choose "5 a Day for Better Health." That means eating five fruits and vegetables every day to lower your risk of contracting certain types of cancer.

NCI scientists found that eating fruits and vegetables protected against cancer in 82 percent of the 156 different studies conducted. People who ate a lot of fruits and vegetables (five servings a day) had one-half the risk of cancer as people who ate few fruits and vegetables.

Fruits and vegetables are found to have a protective effect against cancers such as lung, breast, mouth, throat, stomach, colon, rectal, cervical, and ovarian.

In a recent workshop at the Delaware County Extension, Fran Alloway, registered dietitian, explained the scientific findings behind research in laymen terms, and prepared some recipes for taste-testing to encourage participants to include more fruits and vegetables in their diets.

When examining the reason why fruits and vegetables are good for us, words such as phytochemicals, oxidation, and flavonoids pop up. Here is a short definition for these words:

- **Phytochemicals** — plant chemicals. An amazing 4,000 phytochemicals have been identified so far, and many more remain to be discovered.
- **Flavonols** give plants taste, smell, and color.
- **Carotenoids** add pigment, which also give color to plants.
- **Antioxidants** — dispose of cell damaging free radicals.
- **Carcinogens** — potentially cancer-causing substances.

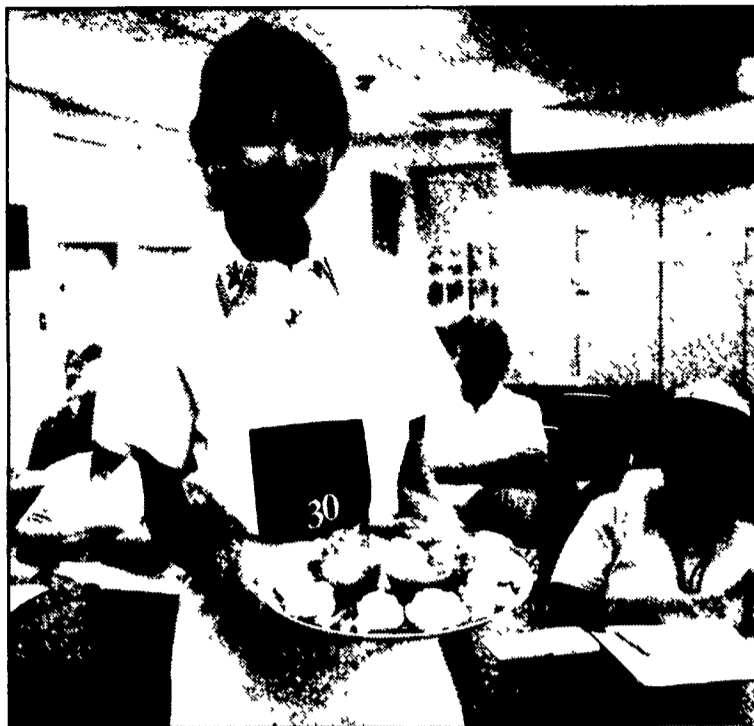
Plants contain natural chemicals called phytochemicals, which are beneficial for health. Some of these chemicals block the steps that lead to cancer and destroy chemicals that help cancer cells grow. But no one knows how many phytochemicals we need.

Oxidation is a chemical reaction that causes damage in our bodies and appears to play a role in promoting cancer. Some antioxidants in fruits and vegetables destroy chemicals that help cancer cells grow.

Alloway answered questions that participants had about some foods thought to be particularly beneficial. Some tidbits of information were that garlic in its raw form is best because it loses some of its chemical properties when cooked. Chewing on coffee beans is said to counteract the bad breath that garlic induces.

Although low-fat diets are beneficial in counteracting heart diseases and other health-related problems, Alloway pointed out that some vitamins require fat in order for their properties to be released.

Some foods considered beneficial to women include flax and soy products. Flax contains lig-



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nans that are converted to a form of estrogen in the body and are thought to have some protective effect against cancer. Alloway recommends grinding flax seed and sprinkling on food. "Lignans are not found in flaxseed oil," she said.

Soy plant products such as tofu, soy milk, and soybeans are believed to be beneficial in preventing female cancers. Alloway reminded workshop participants that soy-plant protein is incomplete in vegetarian diets and needs to be fortified with B12 vitamins.

A wide variety of fruits and vegetables should be included in diets because different vegetables offer different phytochemicals, but scientists are uncertain exactly what kind and how many of each is needed.

Supplements are not recommended in place of eating fruits and vegetables.

"To get the phytochemicals you need, base your diet on a minimum of five servings a day on a variety of fruits and vegetables and 6-10 servings of whole grains," Alloway said.

Research is on the cutting edge, and scientists have untested theories about how plant chemicals work in our bodies.

For example, a study shows that a link between a high intake of tomato consumption reduces prostate cancer. Lycopene, plentiful in tomatoes, may be the protective element, but it is not proven.

Although research may change its findings, it is believed that tea, particularly green tea, may reduce the risk of cancers and protect arteries from plaque buildup.

Contact your county Penn State Extension for more information and fact sheets on benefits of eating fruits and vegetables.

## GARDENER'S SPECIAL PLATTER

- 1 pound fresh broccoli, chopped
- 1/2 small head cauliflower, broken into pieces
- 1 medium zucchini, sliced
- 3 tablespoons butter, melted
- 1/2 teaspoon garlic salt
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon dried thyme
- 2 medium tomatoes, cut into wedges
- 1/4 cup parmesan cheese

On 12-inch glass microwave safe-serving plate, arrange cauliflower and broccoli pieces around edge of plate, placing broccoli with stems toward the edge and alternating with cauliflower. Pile zucchini in center of

plate. Cover vegetables with plastic wrap. Microwave on high 9-11 minutes until vegetables are tender. Combine butter, garlic salt, salt, and thyme, and pour over cooked vegetables. Arrange tomato wedges over vegetables. Sprinkle with cheese; microwave uncovered 2 minutes to warm tomatoes.

## TRIPLE-PEPPERED SAUSAGE

- 1 pound fully-cooked smoked turkey sausage (kielbasa)
- 1 medium green pepper, cut into strips
- 1 medium red bell pepper, cut into strips
- 1 banana pepper, seeded, sliced crosswise
- 1 medium onion, thinly sliced, separated into rings
- 1/4 cup water
- 1 tablespoon prepared mustard

Cut sausage into 2-inch pieces; slash each piece vertically with a sharp knife to cut through skin and about 1/4-inch meat. Place the sausage in a 10x6x2-inch dish. Arrange all peppers and onion rings around and over sausage pieces. Shake together water and mustard and pour over sausage mixture. Cover with plastic wrap and microwave on high 9-11 minutes until sausage is hot and vegetables are tender. Serve as a main course or stuff into sandwich rolls or pita bread. Serves 4-6.

## BLUEBERRY COBBLER

- 2 pints fresh blueberries
- 1 1/4 cups sugar
- 1/4 cup corn starch
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon lemon juice
- 2 cups package biscuit mix
- 3/4 cup milk
- 3 tablespoons crushed granola (optional)

Cinnamon and sugar  
Place blueberries in 2-3-quart glass casserole dish. Stir together corn starch, sugar, and 1 teaspoon cinnamon; mix well. Stir into blueberries. Microwave on high 4-6 minutes, stirring after 2 minutes and every minute afterwards until blueberries bubble and corn starch mixture becomes translucent.

Combine biscuit mix and milk. Dollop six mounds of mixture over hot fruit. Sprinkle with cinnamon and sugar. Microwave, uncovered, medium-high 4-7 minutes until biscuits are set, rotating dish halfway through cooking. Top with granola if desired. Serve warm with ice cream. Serves 6.

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