

cancer food myths

Cancer

An overwhelming number of claims fill the internet about foods or eating habits that may cause or prevent cancer. These claims are often incorrect and may lead to unnecessary worrying. Before you panic, look at the facts below to learn the truth surrounding some of the most common food claims.

Sugar feeds cancer.

There isn't enough evidence to support a claim that sugar directly causes cancer. However, a diet high in added sugar is typically also high in fat and calories. Eating a high-fat and calorie diet may lead to increased weight gain and potentially obesity. Obesity has been linked with 11 different types of cancer. The [American Heart Association](#) recommends limiting added sugar intake to 6 teaspoons (24 grams) for women and 9 teaspoons (36 grams) for men per day. It's recommended to consume a nutrient-dense diet to lower your risk of cancer. Aim to include fruits, vegetables, whole grains, lean or plant-based protein, legumes, nuts and seeds, and low-fat dairy. It's also important to avoid sugar-sweetened beverages (soda, juice, sweetened tea, energy drinks) and make water your drink of choice.

Too much dairy is harmful.

Dairy is a great source of calcium, vitamin D, and protein. Currently, there is limited research on whether dairy is harmful and causes cancer. If choosing to consume dairy, it's best to stick to the recommended 2 cups per day, and reach for low-fat versions of your favorite cheese, milk, and yogurt. Full-fat varieties can have high amounts of saturated fat, a type of fat that is best consumed in moderation.

Supplements help fight cancer.

Vitamins and minerals help to fight inflammation within the body and are found in healthy foods (fruits, vegetables, grains, beans, nuts, seeds) and supplements. Supplements may seem like an easy way to obtain the nutrients your body needs to fight inflammation, but they often contain high doses that may be harmful. Supplements can also interact with cancer medications. Therefore, the [American Institute for Cancer Research \(AICR\)](#) recommends patients should not rely on them to help fight cancer. Instead, aim to eat a diet rich in whole foods, engage in daily physical activity, and implement stress management techniques. If you choose to incorporate supplements, always consult your pharmacists or health care provider first.

Superfoods will cure and prevent cancer.

"Superfood" is a marketing term that is used to describe foods that offer additional health benefits. Common foods labeled as "superfoods" include green tea, legumes, leafy greens, turmeric, nuts and seeds, berries and several other healthy foods. All of these are rich in antioxidants, vitamins, and minerals that do help promote better health, but there isn't one food that a person can eat to cure or prevent cancer. To lower the risk of cancer, it's best to include a wide variety of foods in the diet including whole grains, lean or plant-based proteins, low-fat dairy, nuts and seeds, fruits and vegetables.

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You should only eat organic foods.

“Organic” is the word used to describe a type of farming. Organic farming uses farming practices that are free from harmful pesticides and helps to support a healthier planet. This type of farming doesn’t use toxins, synthetic fertilizers, genetically modified organisms (GMOs), antibiotics, synthetic growth hormones, artificial preservatives, flavors, or colors to prevent pests. The research isn’t clear on the long-term effects of organic or non-organic food consumption and cancer risk. If you choose to purchase organic products, the [Environmental Working Group \(EWG\)](#) offers a variety of information on purchasing organically, including the “Dirty Dozen” and “Clean Fifteen” shopping lists. Whether you choose organic or non-organic, it’s always important to wash your fruits and vegetables prior to eating to reduce bacteria and pesticide intake.

Soy food will increase the risk of breast cancer.

Currently, research is limited on the harmful effects of soy and cancer risk. Soy foods (tofu, edamame, miso, tempeh, and soymilk) may lower the risk of cancer. Additionally, soy foods are great sources of lean protein and when used to replace red and processed meat may help lower cholesterol levels and reduce the risk of heart disease.