

Introduction

Head and neck cancer patients have specialized nutrition needs. The presence of a tumor changes the body's needs and the way the body uses nutrients. These changes may lead to increased calorie and nutrient needs.

Overview

Eating is essential to living. Calories from food supply the brain and body with energy. Protein keeps the muscles strong and fat provides energy and protects organs. Vitamins and minerals allow the body to function at its best.

Each person requires a certain number of calories and nutrients. Each person is different and these calorie and nutrient needs increase during times of growth, activity, stress and illness.

Calorie basics:

- If calories are consumed in excess of what is metabolized, weight gain occurs.
- If too few calories are consumed, weight loss occurs.

Goals for Surgery or Cancer Treatment

Cancer patients who are preparing for surgery, chemotherapy or radiation treatment need to make the most of their nutrition intake. Inadequate intake and weight loss weakens the body and immune system and may slow healing. If a patient is overweight, surgery or cancer treatment is not a time for weight loss. At the completion of treatment, contact a registered dietitian for assistance with healthy eating goals and a weight loss plan.

Nutrition Goals during Treatment

- Goal 1:* Consume adequate calories to maintain body weight.
- Goal 2:* Choose high protein foods such as eggs, beef, chicken, fish, cheese, beans and nuts.
- Goal 3:* Add snacks in between meals if needed to increase calorie intake.
- Goal 4:* Choose commercial liquid supplements as a meal replacement or snack.
- Goal 5:* Meet daily fluid needs – about 60-70 ounces each day.

Cancer Survivorship Recommendations

Through scientific research, we know of the many associations of nutrition and cancer. Recommendations for cancer prevention are the same as those to prevent other chronic diseases. Therefore, healthy eating is important not only for cancer prevention but also to prevent obesity, hypertension, heart disease and diabetes.

Antioxidants

People who consume a diet high in antioxidants may have a reduced risk of developing cancer. Antioxidants come from many sources such as:

- Fruits
- Vegetables
- Whole grains
- Beans and legumes
- Nuts

It is recommended to consume five or more servings of fruits and vegetables daily, make half your grains whole and have one ounce of nuts each day.

Omega-3 Fats

Omega-3 fats are “healthy” fats. Research has shown that diets high in omega-3 fats are beneficial in the protection of cancer.

Some examples are:

- Salmon, herring, mackerel
- Walnuts
- Flax seed – ground or oil
- Canola Oil

It is recommended to eat two servings of fish weekly, one ounce of walnuts or one table-spoon of ground flax seed each day.

Fiber

Foods high in fiber have been associated with reduced cancer risk. Some ways to get fiber is with products that contain:

- Fruits and vegetables
- Whole wheat
- Oats
- Bran
- Beans and legumes

Every person needs about 25 grams of fiber every day.

Vitamin Supplementation

There is no scientific evidence that vitamin supplements prevent or cure cancer. They are beneficial as an addition to a healthy diet however, during cancer treatment, it is recommended that patients refrain from taking vitamin or herbal supplements. Most products have not been tested with cancer treatments to determine benefit or harm.