

Cancer News: Diet, Lifestyle and Supplements

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Prevention is in your hands!

Cancer is the number one day-to-day health concern in America according to the survey released at the 11th Annual Research Conference of the American Institute for Cancer Research (AICR). Results prove that Americans are deeply worried about cancer but are misinformed about the steps they can take to prevent the disease, half of all Americans believe it is impossible or next to impossible to prevent cancer.

When asked, "What are proven risks for getting cancer?" 92 percent say they believe tobacco causes cancer, and 90 percent cite excessive exposure to sunlight. 89 percent considered inherited predisposition (i.e., "cancer genes") as a cause of cancer.

AICR experts who conducted the survey expressed considerable surprise and dismay that most Americans overlooked other factors that have also been proven to increase cancer risk. Only 46 percent identified diets low in fruits and vegetables as a cancer promoter, only 42 percent believed alcohol to affect cancer risk, and only 35 percent cited obesity or insufficient physical activity. These four factors alone have been convincingly linked to 11 different types of cancer.

AICR Director of Nutrition Education Melanie Polk, RD, presented the survey findings along with Dr. Richard M. Niles, Professor and Chair of the Department of Biochemistry at Marshall University School of Medicine at the 11th Annual Research Conference of the American Institute for Cancer Research in Washington DC.

"Americans are telling us three things: they are worried about cancer, they feel it is inevitable, and they are largely unaware of the steps they can take to reduce their risk," said Polk. "Anxiety, Feelings of Helplessness, and Lack of Knowledge - it's a dangerous combination.

"Luckily," she continued, "there is clear and convincing evidence that the choices we make everyday - choices like what foods we eat and whether or not we exercise, drink, or smoke - have a dramatic impact on our risk of getting cancer. In fact, making these decisions in a healthy way can prevent 60 to 70 percent of all cancers. That's an empowering message, and one that desperately needs to be heard."

The top three cancer causes mentioned by Americans - tobacco, excessive exposure to the sun, and inherited predisposition - are certainly legitimate ones," said Polk. "It's gratifying to see that the word is getting out about tobacco, which is single-handedly responsible for 87 percent of all lung cancers, and one in five deaths in the United States today. Americans also seem to know about excessive sun exposure, which will cause approximately 1.3 million cases of skin cancer this year."

But, Polk said, the story about the third most-often mentioned factor, inherited predisposition is considerably more complex. An overwhelming 89 percent of Americans cited inherited predisposition (i.e., "cancer genes") as a cause of cancer. Yet researchers estimate that only about five to 10 percent of all cancers can be attributed to a genetic predisposition.

"When you consider that 30 to 40 percent of cancers can be attributed to poor diets, lack of physical activity and excessive body weight - and that far fewer Americans were able to identify those three factors - it's clear that people's priorities need to change." Polk added that those who do inherit BRCA1, APC, p53 and other so-called "cancer genes" are indeed at a higher cancer risk than the rest of the population. But even these people can significantly reduce their cancer risk by making healthy changes to their diet and lifestyle.

AICR Diet and Health Guidelines for Cancer Prevention

- Choose a diet rich in a variety of plant-based foods.
- Eat plenty of vegetables and fruit - 7 servings a day.
- Maintain a healthy weight and be physically active.
- Drink alcohol only in moderation, if at all.
- Select foods low in fat and salt.
- Prepare and store foods safely.
- Do not use tobacco in any form.

Dina Khader, M.S., R.D., president of the Khader Group in Mt. Kisco, NY attended the American Institute for Cancer Research Conference in Washington, DC. She reported, "It was heartening to see that all members of the healthcare community including medical doctors are coming together to recognize that diet and supplementation is one of our greatest defenses against cancer." The medical community stands together to say that fruits and vegetables are the single-most powerful tool we have in our fight against the number one dreaded disease in America.

Ms. Khader reports on some of the findings presented at this year's conference. She points out that since food sources are unreliable because of poor soil or growing conditions, supplements that are standardized can be a better choice.

An ingredient found in broccoli, indol 3 carbinol has proved in studies to remove excess estrogen from the body, much like the drug tamoxifen. Since many cancers are estrogen linked, indol 3 carbinol can be an effective tool in reducing risk. The recommended dosage is at least 150 mg. each day.

Broccoli sprouts contain an even more potent ingredient, sulphoraphane, which not only reduces the amount of estrogen in the system, but actually attacks tumors and reduces their size in the laboratory. Dosage for broccoli sprout extract is 250 mg. or more daily.

Resveratrol, found in the skin of grapes, has been shown to shrink tumors and can be taken preventively. It is also an estrogen-blocker. If at risk for tumor growth, particularly skin cancer, supplementing with resveratrol could prevent onset.

Japanese green tea contains antioxidants that block tumor growth and can reduce incidence of cancer or prevent onset. Drinking green tea is helpful, but not enough. Powder capsule or liquid extract form is much more effective. Polyphenols in the tea have cancer protective effect. It should be pointed out that Japanese green tea is an effective aid in weight loss because it breaks down fat. Since normal body weight is desired to lower risk of cancer, Japanese green tea is effective in this arena as well.

Astragalus, a Chinese herb, helps boost the immune system. It is even safe to take while receiving chemotherapy or radiation therapy to prevent colds or flu. Astragalus is also an estrogen blocker. It increases white blood cell count. There are not any contraindications except for pregnant and breast feeding women.

Ms. Khader also points out that self-prescribing is never a good idea. A healthcare practitioner should be consulted before taking any supplements. She encourages eating more fruits and vegetables (7 servings a day). It has always been her belief, and the AICR at this year's conference has concurred, that organically grown foods are the best choice because the nutrients of the soil are greater and there is no risk of pesticides and herbicides that can drastically hinder immune response. In addition, whole grains are recommended over processed grains.

As time goes on, it is clear that an integrative approach to the treatment of cancer and other diseases is becoming mainstream, finally.