



# The Importance of Nutrition on Your Cancer Journey



ella dawson  
FOUNDATION

helping young adults  
live **well** with cancer



Embracing Nutrition  
& Functional Medicine

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# Nutritional Support and Cancer

Good nutrition provides your body with the tools it needs to deal with the stresses throughout your cancer journey, treatment and towards recovery. As in any time of stress, eating well can suffer.

At some times during your treatment, you might find it hard to eat well or you may discover your medicines make your food smell or taste strange, so you don't feel like eating at all. But treatments can mean it's harder for your body to absorb the nutrients in your food, making it doubly important to make sure your diet is nutritious.

So we thought we'd write this eBook so you can learn a bit more about the food you eat and the health of your body before, during, and after any treatment you may have, so your body can be as healthy as possible.

In this e-book, you'll learn about sources of good nutrition, your body's incredible natural defences against disease and how you can use nutrition to help tap into these defences, support recovery and have improved health and wellbeing.

Hopefully after reading this, wherever you are in your diagnosis, you'll have some handy, simple and delicious tools to make your life easier when deciding what to eat to best support your body at this time.





So, with the help of this eBook, we hope you'll be able to take this opportunity to adopt as many healthy eating habits as you can.

Looking after yourself by making healthy food choices can be so empowering at this bewildering time, whether you've recently been diagnosed, you're on your treatment journey, recovering from surgery or recently finished treatment. Read on for a journey into the exciting and fascinating world of nutrition.





# Knowledge is Power

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There is a huge amount of information out there about the link between diet, nutrition and cancer but it's important to remember not all of it has been scientifically validated. All this information can be overwhelming and confusing, especially when you're trying to come to terms with a cancer diagnosis and navigating treatment.

Your journey through cancer sometimes may seem all-consuming, and you may feel bombarded with conflicting advice.

So hopefully you will find this general booklet informative and empowering for you. Remember the content here is general advice only and can't take into account your personal situation. Everyone's cancer diagnosis is different and it's important that you get the specific nutritional advice that's right for you. Your healthcare team may suggest specific medical diets because of the type of cancer or treatment you have.

If you feel you would benefit from one-to-one support through your cancer journey, I can help by providing a personalised nutritional programme, herbal and supplement advice and lifestyle recommendations to help you through treatment and beyond.

*- Jo Gamble*



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# The Importance of Food

Your body does an incredible job every day, but it needs the right nutrients and in the correct proportions, especially when it has challenges to meet.

A healthy diet delivers a concentrated source of nutrients, the nuts and bolts your body uses to protect and heal itself. Nutrient-rich food can help manage the side effects of treatment, guard against muscle wastage and support you in remaining a healthy weight.

With some savvy food choices, you can provide your body with a ready-made arsenal to protect your health. Paying attention to your nutrition can not only provide your healthy cells with the ingredients they need to function correctly but can also complement your treatment and recovery.





# A healthy diet – the basics

Eating well can help to maintain general physical and emotional well-being and it can be something that helps you to feel more in control of your health.

There is no single diet for cancer and it's important to give your body the protein, calories and nutrients it requires to withstand and recover from the side effects of treatment and to help you become physically and emotionally stronger.

Everyone is different and it's important to choose foods which you enjoy, which suit you, and which are easy to prepare.

So what are the basics?

In any healthy diet, there are certain foods that are best avoided and other foods which are a better alternative, much more so when you have a chronic illness such as cancer. It's all about giving your body the very best chance to fight off disease and support recovery by emphasising helpful foods and avoiding harmful ones.

Eating well means choosing a wide variety of nutritious foods every day that provide enough energy and a good balance of protein and other nutrients, to maintain a healthy weight, build immunity, reduce fatigue and improve energy levels.



Helpful foods include:

- Colourful fruit and vegetables (preferably organic) containing their natural fibre. Steaming is a great way to cook them, but experiment with casseroles, curries and stir-fries. Aim for at least half of your plate to be covered by an array of rainbow veg.
- Fish, especially oily fish like wild-caught salmon, mackerel, sardines, pilchards and trout. These contain the essential omega 3 fat known to control inflammation.
- Healthy oils. Olive oil is great for low-temperature cooking and as a salad dressing. Also delicious on salads is flaxseed oil, packed with omega 3. Keep it in the fridge and don't use it to cook with. For higher-temperature cooking, coconut oil comes out top as it's so stable. Try to avoid using sunflower oil for cooking – it breaks down and becomes inflammatory when heated.
- Organic chicken – try to find pasture-raised chicken, as the meat is better quality than 100% grain-fed chicken. Organic eggs are a great source of protein, too.
- Pulses and lentils are fantastic vegetarian protein sources. Try tofu – it's great in stir-fries.
- Unsalted seeds and nuts not only contain protein but pack in fibre and healthy fats, too.
- Fermented foods like miso, kimchi, sauerkraut, kefir and kombucha.
- Some grains. We haven't talked about grains yet and this is because many people already eat a lot of them. Make sure they're wholegrain (like brown rice) and try to steer clear of too many gluten-containing grains like wheat. Some people can be sensitive to gluten because it's a tricky protein to digest, particularly if your digestive system is struggling. Gluten-free oats are widely available, and they're especially easy on digestion if they're soaked overnight before eating. Other gluten free-grains include buckwheat and millet, as well as quinoa (although this is technically a seed, not a grain).





# Amazing Antioxidants

Antioxidants are substances that can prevent or slow damage to cells caused by free radicals which are unstable molecules that the body produces as a reaction to environmental or other pressures.

Antioxidants are found in plant-based foods and give them their vibrant colours. There are many different types of antioxidants and although they work in slightly different ways, they work a bit like an orchestra, protecting and supporting each other. This is why it's really good to eat plenty of plant foods, containing a wide range of antioxidants.

Examples of foods that contain antioxidants blue and purple foods (anthocyanidins) are beetroot, blueberries, blackcurrants, plums, aubergines, red onion and red cabbage. These antioxidants seem to be able to slow down some chemical reactions and are also anti-inflammatory.

Other antioxidants (Resveratrol) can be found in red grape skins, and in lower concentrations in blueberries, bilberries, raspberries and blackberries and are known to have positive health benefits.





Many green vegetables including broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower and kale contain the antioxidant sulforaphane which is especially useful in helping your liver detect harmful substances.

Because all these antioxidants have different colours you can see how beneficial it is to have a wide range of different colours on your plate every day because each colour represents a different antioxidant.

Fruit and vegetables containing these nutrients are best if they are organic. That way you are getting a concentrated source of antioxidants without any pesticides or herbicides your liver has to work hard to remove before they can do any further damage to your cells.

Eating lots of different types of foods rather than the same food day in day out maximises the nutrients you'll be getting from your diet.

Now let's go on to look at some of the less than helpful foods in terms of keeping your body healthy.



## Processed Foods

Anything processed comes with added flavourings, preservatives, colourings and sweeteners. These additives are simply extra chemicals for your liver to process.

Overload your waste-disposal system with unnecessary rubbish, and it won't have as much spare capacity to work for you to detoxify the things you can't avoid, like environmental pollutants.

By processed foods, we mean pastries, cakes, biscuits, high-sugar cereals, crisps, ready meals and sauces – in fact, anything with a long list of ingredients.

If you need to reach for something ready-made, a good guide is to choose something with the fewest amount of ingredients listed on the label.



## Added Sugar

The majority of processed foods contain added sugar in one form or another. This is why we're challenging you to reduce your sugar intake. Added Sugar does not support a healthy diet. It plays havoc with your microbiome (gut), messes up your blood glucose and promotes inflammation, not to mention promoting obesity. We're all getting fatter – everyone is super-sizing, even young people, because processed foods contain a huge number of calories and very little nutrition, and we're not moving enough. Obesity is strongly linked to cancer.

There are over 50 different names for sugar. Have a look at any list of ingredients, for example, a cereal bar, and see if you can spot the added sugar. The names often, but not always, end with -ose – such as sucrose, glucose, dextrose and maltose.

One important thing to remember is many foods naturally contain a certain amount of sugar, all tied up with the vitamins, minerals and fibre also in the food. This sugar is a natural part of your diet, and there's no need for you to avoid fruit and vegetables containing natural sugar.

However, where sugar becomes a problem is when it's artificially added to food or drink. Sugar is super addictive. This is why it's added to practically every type of processed food because it makes us want to eat more of the food. You might think food would be boring without added sugar. But because sugar is so addictive, once you reduce your sugar intake you won't crave it any longer, and foods you used to enjoy will taste unbearably sweet.

Beware of sugary drinks too – they contain minimal nutritional value and can contain a type of sugar made from corn, high-fructose corn syrup (HFCS). This substance is strongly inflammatory and stresses out your hardworking liver.





## Processed Meat

Processed meat products are bad news for your health. Processed meat has been linked with bowel cancer because it can trigger the production of compounds able to damage the bowel wall and ultimately cause cancer.

Such products include bacon, sausages, ham, salami, chorizo and meat pies. They also contain all manner of preservatives and other chemicals. Well-done, fried or barbecued meat seems to be especially damaging because this creates chemicals capable of damaging DNA.

Rather than feeling like you're missing out, why not focus on having some organic, preferably grass-fed meat from time to time. It is more expensive, so keep it for an occasional treat. Animals fed on grass produce different meat and milk with more beneficial fats than those fed on grain, nowadays the norm in modern industrial farming.

After all, animals evolved to eat grass, and feeding grain is a relatively recent trend. So, by choosing free-range grass-fed, you'll be getting more nutrients than by eating regular factory-produced meat – and it's better for the planet, too.





## A Little of What you Fancy

Remember, food is not only nourishing, but it's also a source of pleasure, so don't be hard on yourself if you fancy a little something as a treat from time to time. Life is meant to be enjoyable and stressing out over what you're eating or not eating will be tougher on your health in the long run.

Plus, if you're journeying through cancer treatment, you may not feel like eating or you might find you're losing weight, so making sure you're eating enough is really important.





# Everyday Eating

## Breakfast

Porridge is a wonderful breakfast, and why not soak it overnight in oat or almond milk? This wakes up the grain, making it more nutritious and easier to digest, meaning it's kinder to your body.

Chia seed puddings are an amazingly quick, no-cook nutritious breakfast, dessert or snack you can make ahead and chill overnight ready for the morning. Chia seeds are packed with healthy fats, fibre and protein. All you need are chia seeds, dairy-free milk such as coconut milk or cashew milk, honey and vanilla. Serve with some berries of your choice.

Breakfast omelette with spinach, red pepper or peas – let your imagination run wild! Fry gently in coconut oil.

Oat pancake – mix one beaten egg with some soaked oats, buckwheat flour, a chopped banana and some dairy-free milk. Serve with blueberries.

Sweet potato pancake – blend cooked sweet potato with egg, buckwheat flour and dairy-free milk. This is delicious served with coconut yoghurt.

Breakfast smoothies – add some spinach or kale for a wonderful green smoothie, plus banana, berries and some yoghurt or tofu to make it creamy. You can always add some coconut water – it's great for hydration and will make your smoothie taste amazing.



## Snacks

Some healthy and delicious snack suggestions include:

- Fruit alongside no added sugar or salt nut butter. Cashew, almond and hazelnut butters are delicious and contain natural healthy fats.
- Slices of avocado on rice or oatcakes or wholegrain sourdough toast.
- Boiled eggs. Eggs are packed full of protein, healthy fats and B vitamins.
- Natural yoghurt with berries such as blueberries, raspberries and goji berries. Berry fruits are powerhouses of nutrients, packed with antioxidants yet lower in sugar than many other fruits.

If you have times during your treatment when you don't feel hungry, have snacks little and often when you can stomach them.





## Lunches

Soups are great if you don't feel much like eating. Try to include some sort of protein in your soup because this will keep you feeling full for longer as well as helping your body repair itself.

Lentils especially red lentils are great because they blend into the soup and you'd hardly know they were there. Make a big batch of soup and freeze it in individual portions for hassle-free lunches.

Always accompany your lunches with a big, colourful salad.







## Dinners



Try courgette noodles in place of pasta – they take seconds to cook. To avoid buying them pre-prepared, a spiralizer is a great investment and fun to use. You can also then make beetroot and carrot ribbons, wonderful in salads.

For a super quick and fuss-free dinner, pop a roasted salmon steak on top of your courgette noodles.

Stir-fries are great when you're in a hurry, plus they look amazing. Useful to include in your stir fry are broccoli and cauliflower florets, kale, spinach, peas, sliced carrots, shredded cabbage, mushrooms, red pepper, and some chicken, prawns, tofu or nuts for protein. Add miso for flavouring and serve with rice noodles.

Curries are a fantastic choice because they contain healthy spices, and can be made super-quickly. Fry together some chopped onions and garlic in a little coconut oil, then pop in spices to your taste, including turmeric, coriander and cumin. Add some chopped tomatoes and plenty of veg (cauliflower works really well).

Simmer until the veg is tender, then throw in a tin of chickpeas and some coconut milk and hey presto you have your curry. Serve with brown rice, or try quinoa for a change.



## Desserts

For dessert, try fruit salad with coconut yoghurt, berry buckwheat pancakes or delicious beetroot brownies.

To make the brownies:

1. Cook two small beetroots till soft, remove skins, chop then throw into a blender with about 350g pitted dates, soaked overnight,
2. Add 60g nut butter and 120ml almond milk.
3. Blend until it forms an amazing pink sauce.
4. Add 350g ground almonds, 75g cocoa powder and 2 teaspoons baking powder, mix well and transfer into a rectangular tin.
5. Bake for around 20 mins at gas mark 4, and try to resist eating one until it has cooled down at least a little!





## Drinks

To combat nausea, try sipping peppermint tea, ginger tea or fennel tea.

Tea and coffee are best avoided, but green tea contains helpful antioxidants.

Drinking alcohol has been connected with several cancers. It makes your liver work harder, has little nutritional value, and can alter your hormone balance.

Aim to cut down alcohol as much as you can, and if you do drink, choose organic red wine (you'll then be getting some antioxidants from the grape skins) and have as many alcohol-free days per week as you can manage.







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Our vision is to help every young adult with cancer to live well, to feel supported and to be empowered throughout and beyond a cancer diagnosis

The Ella Dawson Foundation is a national charity providing a safe supportive and uplifting space where young adults, aged 18-30 years old at any stage of a cancer diagnosis, along with their families, can access tailored physical, psychological, emotional, nutritional, wellbeing support within a welcoming and like-minded community.

Our mission is to provide tailored wellbeing support packages unique to the needs of young adults building their personal wellbeing and resilience and helping young adults with cancer to live well, to feel supported and to be empowered throughout and beyond a cancer diagnosis.



[www.elladawsonfoundation.org.uk](http://www.elladawsonfoundation.org.uk) & [www.elladawsonartist.co.uk](http://www.elladawsonartist.co.uk)



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