Plant-Based Diets and Cancer

By Holly Mills, Registered Dietitian Nutritionist, MS, RDN, CSO

In honor of World Cancer Day on February 4, our God's Love We Deliver Registered Dietitian Nutritionists share tips for following a plant-based diet for people living with cancer.

Eating mostly plant foods can help protect you from cancer and other diseases such as heart disease and Type 2 diabetes. Additional benefits associated with plant-forward eating include immune support, weight maintenance, increased fiber intake, and decreased inflammation.

Following a plant-based diet does not mean you have to exclude meat, chicken, or fish. It simply means your meals are focused on mostly plant foods. The diet consists primarily of fruits and vegetables, nuts, seeds, whole grains, and legumes. When preparing your plate, fill two-thirds with plant foods like fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. In the remaining one-third is where you can include a lean animal protein like chicken, turkey, or fish, or a plant protein like tofu, beans, lentils, or quinoa.

When transitioning to a plant-based diet, focus on whole foods and keep processed foods to a minimum. Avoid lower quality foods like fruit juices, refined grains, and sweets.

It is best to speak to your healthcare provider before making diet and lifestyle changes. Individuals in treatment who are interested in following a plant-based diet may need to modify their approach. For example, people experiencing side effects such as chewing difficulty or digestive issues may need to modify the texture of the plant foods they eat or cook their vegetables well for greater tolerance. Additionally, individuals living with cancer may have increased protein needs during treatment or post-surgery. A good way to meet those needs is to include lean animal protein or plant-based protein with all meals and snacks.

If you are in treatment, it is helpful to meet with a Registered Dietitian Nutritionist (RDN). An RDN can help you choose a meal pattern that
ensures you meet your nutritional needs and assists with the symptoms you are experiencing.

For more information on plant-based diets, please see the resources below:

- Meatless Monday-https://www.mondaycampaigns.org/meatless-monday

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