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[Home](#) > Breast cancer prevention and nutrition

Breast cancer prevention and nutrition ^[1]

Dear Alice,

What types of foods should I eat to prevent breast cancer?

— Concerned about breast cancer

Answer

Dear Concerned about breast cancer,

While research is still inconclusive about a clear connection between certain foods and breast cancer prevention, there's some mixed evidence to suggest that diet may affect breast cancer risk. However, other lifestyle patterns may also increase a person's protection against breast cancer (more on these later!). That being said, of the many factors that impact someone's breast cancer risk, food choices may be one of which you have some control. Consuming more fruits and vegetables and limiting saturated fats and alcohol could help protect against breast cancer. Read on for more tips on minimizing your risk.

Generally speaking, it's a good idea to eat a diet full of plants as they're high in fiber, vitamins, and minerals to help decrease the risk for developing all kinds of cancers. Certain fruits and vegetables high in phytochemicals, antioxidants, and other nutrients help your body fight disease. Eating foods that are naturally low in fat, cholesterol, salt, and sugar can also help reduce the risk of developing heart disease, strokes, diabetes, and obesity, and they can also alleviate constipation.

To be more specific, particular nutrients have been found to have antioxidant ^[2] activity, so eating foods with these nutrients may help to curb the risk for developing cancer. To get the most benefit from the antioxidant activity in these nutrients, it's helpful to get them from food rather than dietary supplements. Some scientists believe it's the interaction of nutrients along with many substances in food (not in pills) that are the protective factors against cancer.

In addition to eating more fruits and vegetables, it's also good to limit certain types of food in order to maximize your protection against breast cancer. Instead of using fats such as butter, margarine, or hydrogenated oils, it might be good to try using healthier fats such as olive oil,

avocado, nuts, and seeds. Additionally, if you choose to consume alcohol, consider keeping consumption to two or less servings per week, as it may be a risk factor for a variety of cancers. For more reading about how cancer and diet are related, you may find the [Cancer and diet](#) [3] Q&A to be beneficial.

In addition to considering diet, some other factors that a person may have control over when it comes to their risk includes maintaining a healthy weight, being physically active, and limited alcohol intake. Additionally, if you're considering taking hormonal birth control containing estrogen, you may want to speak with a health care provider about your overall risk factors to determine if it's the appropriate choice for you. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) highlight some [additional prevention steps](#) [4] and provide some more info! There's still much to be learned about breast cancer prevention. If you have any further questions, you may consider making an appointment to talk with a health care provider.

Alice!

Category:

[General Health](#) [5]

[Cancer](#) [6]

[Nutrition & Physical Activity](#) [7]

[Food Choices & Health](#) [8]

Related questions

[Paternal grandmother – Breast cancer link?](#) [9]

[Mammogram](#) [10]

[Male breast cancer](#) [11]

Resources

[Medical Services \(Morningside\)](#) [12]

[Medical Services \(CUIMC\)](#) [13]

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Footer menu

- ▼ [Contact Alice!](#)
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Links

- [1] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/breast-cancer-prevention-and-nutrition-0>
- [2] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/antioxidants>
- [3] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/cancer-diet>
- [4] https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/breast/basic_info/prevention.htm
- [5] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/general-health>
- [6] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/cancer>
- [7] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/nutrition-physical-activity>
- [8] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/category/food-choices-health>
- [9] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/paternal-grandmother-%E2%80%93-breast-cancer-link-0>
- [10] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/mammogram-0>
- [11] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/answered-questions/male-breast-cancer-3>
- [12] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/resource/medical-services-morningside>
- [13] <https://goaskalice.columbia.edu/resource/medical-services-cuimc>