

Healing foods to support people living with cancer



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Many factors contribute to cancer which is a complex disease often caused by the interaction of our genes with various environmental triggers. Many factors also need to come together to recover good health. One of the most important is a nutritious diet, high in seasonal green leaves, vegetables, fruits grains and pulses (bean/chickpea family) and low in processed foods. Ideally the food you eat should come from a growing system which avoids the use of chemicals and nurtures the soil. Organic and bio-dynamic systems are chemical free and generally produce the healthiest fertile soil, which in turn grows nutrient dense crops high in vitamins, minerals and phytonutrients ①② (all important for a robust immune system.)

Produce from organic and biodynamic farming systems is usually more expensive and many people can simply not afford it, so look for the best alternatives. Learn which fruit and vegetables are the least contaminated with pesticides. Everyday foods like cabbage, onions, frozen peas and mushrooms are less likely to be grown with chemicals. Others are particularly bad. PAN the UK pesticide action network have produced a [dirty dozen](#) list of those containing the greatest cocktail of pesticides. Try to eat as much fruit and vegetables as possible. Some supermarkets sell wonky fruit and vegetables which are either misshapen, the wrong size or colour and these are usually more affordable.

There are a number of other possible solutions regarding affordability. If you have enough time & energy you can consider growing your own, or join a CSA③ or a community garden ④. Failing this you could order a weekly seasonal fruit and vegetable box ⑤ and have seasonal organic produce delivered to your door.

Our knowledge about the healing benefits of food has increased dramatically over the last 50 years. If for any reason you feel your diet hasn't been ideal, it's never too late to change - we are all on a journey of discovery.

Living with cancer and particularly when undergoing treatment, can adversely affect appetite and the ability to eat well. If you are experiencing any difficulties around food, speak to your medical team, seek out a registered nutritionist or get in touch with a cancer charity like Maggie's ⑥ who offer free cancer support.

Ideas to enliven a jaded appetite

On waking drink the juice of 1/2 lemon in 1 pint of warm water. This helps balance the body.

Try to eat small amounts and often, maybe every 2 – 3 hours.

Keep the fridge and cupboard stocked with simple easy to prepare food you enjoy.

Cook extra and freeze for days you feel less like being in the kitchen.

Join a box scheme and order a weekly fruit and vegetable box. Even when you are not hungry you can make vegetable juices.

Can't face shopping - all major supermarkets deliver.

If your losing weight eat nutritious snacks high in calories and protein. Try full fat yogurt with hemp seeds and seasonal fruit. Hummus, eggs, avocado, nuts and seeds

Drink water between meals to keep hydrated.

If you are able, go for a walk to stimulate the appetite.

If possible share meals with family and friends.

Create yourself a space that is a delight to eat in, a candle and a few flowers make all the difference.

If the smell or taste of food makes you nauseous, try to enlist someone to prepare your meals. People like to help so don't turn down an offer.

Foods to omit from a healing food diet

Ultra processed foods and altered fats

Ultra processed foods, including soft drinks, mass-produced packaged breads, breakfast cereals, cakes, many desserts & snacks generally contain high amounts of simple sugars which cause insulin levels to spike. The more simple sugars we eat the more excessive the amounts of insulin produced. When our bodies produce too much insulin, cancer cells can be encouraged to grow. Ultra-processed foods are associated with a greater risk of developing cancer and an increased risk of dying from cancer. (7)

A high sugar intake also depletes the body of key minerals and vitamins.

All fats are not created equal. It is important to avoid processed foods like biscuits, cakes, pies and fried foods which contain altered fats that are detrimental to health. Always check labels and avoid foods containing hydrogenated oils.

Two poly unsaturated fats omega 3 - *alpha linolenic acid* found in hemp seeds, pumpkin seeds, linseed & walnuts and omega 6 - *linoleic acid* found in hemp seeds, sunflower seeds & sesame are essential in the diet. Oils made from these seeds are not suitable to cook with as heat will alter & damage them. Eating the whole food will provide the most nutritional benefits.

Foods to include in a healing food diet

Green leaves.

Fresh, raw plant foods and especially green leaves are vibrant with high electron energy which provides oxygen to our cells. Low oxygen levels in cells are a contributing factor in cancer development. (8)

Green juices are particularly good to add to your diet. All dark greens, wild and cultivated are good (watercress, parsley, dandelion, spinach, rocket)

Two of the best are kale and nettles

Kale has the highest amount of good-for-you nutrients among green leafy vegetables per calorie of energy. In addition to the wide array of vitamins and minerals researchers have found anti-oxidant, anti-inflammatory and anti-cancer compounds in kale

Nettles have immune-boosting, anti-inflammatory and antifungal properties. Rich in minerals nettles have been shown to increase both red and white blood cell counts, which helps build healthy blood and supports the immune system. (9)

Vegetables.

Plan to include as many vegetable varieties, according to season, as possible. Follow the mantra 'eat a rainbow every day'. In brightly coloured natural produce there are an abundance of plant chemicals, known as phytonutrients, with antioxidant, anti-inflammatory and immune supportive properties. Choose from asparagus, celery, cauliflower, cucumber, fennel, green and red cabbage, colourful peppers, courgettes, tomatoes, kohlrabi, lettuce, leeks, turnips, carrots & beetroot.

Lacto fermented foods

The gut microbiota are critical to the immune system, lacto fermented foods replenish the gut with beneficial bacteria. Kefir, tempeh, kombucha, miso, kimchi, sauerkraut and cultured cheeses are all good choices though some people may decide to avoid dairy.

Linseed

Good source of plant lignans and other phytonutrients that are linked to better survival of breast cancer. Excellent source of the anti-inflammatory omega 3 fatty acid alpha linolenic acid.

Hemp seed

A complete easy to digest protein, contains many minerals and vitamins and provides essential fatty acids omega 6 and omega 3 in the right balance for human nutrition.

Protein

Legumes such as beans, lentils, peas and chickpeas provide you with good quality protein in addition they provide food for beneficial gut bacteria.

Whole grains

Excellent source of B vitamins which are helpful in reducing fatigue and lifting spirits. In addition whole grains provide minerals like iron, magnesium and selenium.

Legumes and whole grains have a high fibre content which is excellent for gut health but may not be appropriate all of the time for people with cancer

Sprouted seeds

Sprouted seeds are nutrition powerhouses. Sprouting breaks down large compounds like protein making them easier to digest. Sprouting also increases the availability of vitamins

Sprouts are easy and inexpensive to grow. All you need are seeds, water a jar and muslin

All edible grains, seeds (with the exception of the deadly nightshade family – tomatoes, aubergine, potatoes and peppers) and legumes (with the exception of kidney beans) can be sprouted.

The following are the best ones to start with

Seed type	Soak	Sprout
Hulled sunflower	6-10 hours	2 days
Hulled buckwheat	60 minutes	2-3 days
Mung	12 hours	3-4 days
Green lentils	12 hours	3-4 days
Aduki bean	12 hours	3-4 days
Clover	6 hours	5 days
Radish	6 hours	5 days
Broccoli	6 hours	5 days

Sprouting times will vary according to the season and warmth.

How to sprout

Pop a couple of tablespoons of seeds into the sprouting jar and cover generously with filtered water fasten a piece of muslin over the top. After soaking for the appropriate time, pour off the soak water and rinse well. Turn the jar upside down and let it drain. Place the jar on its side in a warm place. Rinse the sprouts morning and evening. It is important to keep them moist, warm (room temperature is fine) and well drained until the desired length and age is reached. Once the sprouts are ready rinse in a colander, wash thoroughly, drain, put in a bowl, cover and store in the fridge.

RECIPES

Buckwheat & hemp breakfast

serves 1

handful of sprouted buckwheat

1 dessertspoon pumpkin seeds

1 dessertspoon sunflower seeds

1 teaspoon honey

120 ml hemp milk

seasonal fruit

1 heaped dessertspoon hulled hemp seeds

Soak the buckwheat and seeds with the honey in the hemp drink overnight.

Serve topped with your chosen fruit and hemp seeds.

Spiced kale - winter juice

serves 1

150g kale

2 apples

2cm thumb ginger

2cm thumb turmeric

1/2 lemon

twist of black pepper

teaspoon hemp oil

With the exception of the black pepper and oil, roughly chop everything and feed through your juicer.

Stir in the pepper and oil and drink at once.

Tomato & kale - summer juice

serves 1

5 medium tomatoes

100g kale

1/2 lemon

3 celery sticks

6 basil leaves.

Prepare the vegetables to fit the juicer. Juice and serve

Summer smoothie

serves 1

1/2 cucumber diced

1/2 avocado peeled and chopped

1" piece of turmeric grated

1 dessertspoon hemp oil

twist of black pepper

1 clove garlic

2 tomatoes

juice 1/2 lemon

large handful green leaves – chard, spinach, kale.

Put everything into a blender and blitz until smooth, adding a little water if necessary.

Pour into a glass and drink at once.

Winter smoothie

serves 1

handful of frozen blueberries or 6 ready to eat prunes

2 tablespoons shelled hemp seeds

big handful of spinach

teaspoon shiitake powder (optional)

2 teaspoons raw cacao powder

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

Put everything into a blender and blitz until smooth, adding water as necessary.

Pour into a glass and drink at once.

SEASONAL SOUPS

Winter beetroot soup with sauerkraut

serves 4

700g beetroot, peeled and chopped
1 medium onion, peeled and chopped
1 potato, peeled and chopped
good splash olive oil
1 litre vegetable stock
salt/pepper
4 tablespoons sauerkraut

In a thick-bottomed pan gently cook the beetroot, onion and potato in the olive oil for 5 minutes.

Add the stock and bring to the boil. Simmer gently for 45 minutes. Cool slightly then sieve or blend until smooth, return to the pan, season and heat through. Divide between 4 bowls and top each one with sauerkraut

Spring nettle soup

serves 4

400g nettle tops
150g floury potatoes peeled if necessary & roughly chopped
3 spring onions sliced
1litre vegetable stock
salt & black pepper

Plunge the nettle tops into boiling water for 30 seconds.
Strain through a sieve over a bowl to catch the cooking water for a nourishing herbal tea.

Immediately plunge the nettles into cold water to refresh, drain and set aside.

Put the potatoes, onions and stock into a pan and gently simmer with the lid on until tender. Remove from the heat, cool slightly then blitz in a food processor, with the nettles until smooth.
Return to the pan and warm through. If it seems too thick add a little more stock. Season as necessary with salt & black pepper.

Summer tomato, pepper & chickpea soup

serves 4

1 red onion

1 red pepper

300g tomatoes

1 tablespoon olive oil

500 ml stock

1 chilli, seeds removed and finely chopped

1 garlic clove finely chopped

400g tin of chickpeas (250g drained weight)

a handful of flat leaf parsley chopped

1 lemon, zest and juice

Oven 400C 200C

Peel and thickly slice the onion.

Cut the pepper into chunks discarding the stem and seeds.

Toss the tomatoes, onion and pepper in the olive oil, season with salt and pepper and roast in the oven for 25 minutes or until tender and very lightly coloured

In a medium sized pan bring the stock to the boil, add the chilli and garlic.

Tip in the roasted vegetables and simmer for 1 minute.

Cool slightly then blitz in a blender until smooth. Return to the pan, add the drained chickpeas and cook gently for 3 minutes. Add the parsley, the lemon zest along with lemon juice and salt and pepper to taste and serve



Autumn courgette soup with ginger & turmeric

serves 4

1 leek

1 tablespoon ghee

2 medium courgettes roughly chopped

1 garlic clove finely chopped

2" piece ginger grated

2" piece of turmeric grated

1 handful of flat leaf parsley, leaves and stalks separated and each roughly chopped

1 litre vegetable stock

Trim, clean and slice the leek and very gently soften in the ghee for about 7 minutes. Stir in the courgettes, garlic, ginger, turmeric and the parsley stalks roughly chopped, cook for a further 3 minutes. Tip in the stock, bring to the boil, turn down the heat and simmer for 10 minutes

Remove from the heat, cool slightly then blitz until smooth. Stir the parsley leaves into the soup. Season as necessary with salt and pepper and serve.

Broccoli in tomato sauce with garlic and basil

serves 4

2 cloves garlic chopped

2 onions chopped

2 tablespoons of olive oil

2 1/2 lbs tomatoes chopped

1 1/2 lbs broccoli

large bunch of basil

Cook the garlic and onions in the olive oil mixed with 4 tablespoons of water until soft. Add the tomatoes and half a pint of vegetable stock and simmer gently for 45 minutes. Blitz in a food processor then mix in the torn up bunch of basil. Steam the broccoli for just 2 minutes. Do not overcook. Toss the broccoli in the tomato sauce and serve.

Chickpea, pepper & tomato salad with basil dressing

serves 4

1 red & 1 yellow pepper halved and seeds removed 5 tablespoons olive oil

1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar

small bunch basil shredded

salt and black pepper

400g tin of chickpeas (250g drained weight)

10 cherry tomatoes

4 handfuls of seasonal green leaves.

oven 220C/425F/gas 7

Rub a little oil over the peppers and place cut side down on a baking tray and roast for about 15 minutes or until the skins start to char in the preheated oven. Remove the peppers from the oven and immediately pop into a bowl, cover with a plate and leave the peppers to cool.

When cool peel off the skins & thickly slice

Mix together the olive oil, balsamic and basil. Season with salt & pepper. Drain the beans and tip into the dressing. Cut the cherry tomatoes in half and add to the chickpeas. Divide the green leaves between 4 plates and top with the peppers, chickpeas and tomatoes

Rainbow Salad

serves 2

The following is merely a suggestion of how you can make a salad with all the colours of the rainbow. Create your own version with the vegetables of your choice.

1 tomato
1 carrot
1 green courgette
1 yellow pepper
1 fennel bulb
¼ of a red cabbage
large handful of sunflower sprouts
borage flowers
mint sprigs

for the dressing

8 tablespoons olive oil
4 tablespoons cider vinegar
2 teaspoons honey
¼ teaspoon salt
freshly ground black pepper
1 teaspoon whole grain mustard

Cut all the vegetables into bite size pieces and put into a large bowl. Whisk the dressing ingredients together and gently toss the vegetables with enough dressing to generously coat. Mix in the sunflower sprouts, divide between 2 bowls and top with borage flowers and mint.

Apple, celery & walnut salad with chilli-garlic hemp cream

2 large apples
1 large head celery
24 walnut halves
handful parsley, chopped
2 heads of white or red chicory
1 tablespoon lemon juice

chilli -garlic hemp cream

125g shelled hemp seeds
110ml water
¼ teaspoon chilli powder
1 clove garlic chopped

Process all the ingredients for the chilli-garlic hemp cream in food processor until smooth and creamy. Stores well in fridge 2/3 days.

Quarter and core the apples and finely slice. Wash the celery stalks and chop into small pieces. Combine the apples, celery and walnuts together and toss together with the lemon juice and chopped parsley.

Break up the chicory and divide between four plates. Spoon the apple, celery and walnut mixture in the middle. Place a spoonful of almond mayonnaise in the centre of each salad.

Warm kale salad with shiitake mushrooms

4 large handfuls of kale hard stalk removed and shredded
1/2lb shiitake mushrooms
2 sticks of celery cut into matchsticks
2 carrots cut into matchsticks
1 tsp finely chopped thyme
1” piece of ginger finely grated
1 small chilli finely chopped
1 tablespoon tamari
olive oil

Place the kale in a large pan with 2 tablespoon olive oil and 2 tablespoon water, stir well and cook for about three minutes until wilted; add the tamari, increase the heat and cook until the liquid has evaporated, stir in the thyme, ginger and chilli.

Cook the shiitake in 1 tablespoon of olive oil over a medium heat until softened and beginning to crisp. Add the shiitake, celery and carrots to the kale mixture. Season with salt & pepper. Divide between 4 bowls & serve.

Optimal human health comes from eating nutrient dense foods produced and processed in ways that maximise both the quality and quantity of nutrition.

Ecological health is integral to human health. Food grown using nature based, regenerative farming practices, manage sustainably the complex interactions between water, energy and food, thus protecting and enhancing the environment whilst producing nutritious food.

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Daphne Lambert is an eco-nutritionist focusing on the interactions between agriculture, ecology and human nutrition.

Greencuisine Trust works to bring about a transformation in the way we eat. Through practical food experiences the Trust highlights the connections between our well-being, natural resources, the environment, and our planet.



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