

Health Insights Today

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Nutrition Update

When reading reports on new research, it is important to remember that no single study should be seen as providing the whole truth. The following reports offer helpful clues but in most cases further research is needed before firm conclusions can be drawn.

Ovarian Cancer Survival Rates Increased by Yellow and Cruciferous Vegetable Intake, Decreased by Dairy and Meat

Dietary factors have been the focus of many studies on the etiology of ovarian cancer and may potentially affect survival. Three recent studies outside the United States have suggested that diet plays a role in ovarian cancer survival. Women with the highest fruit and vegetable intakes have better ovarian cancer survival rates than those who generally neglect these foods, according to a new study in the *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*. Researchers examined food patterns prior to ovarian cancer diagnosis in 341 Cook County, Illinois women. They found that yellow and cruciferous vegetables, in particular, were associated with longer survival, while dairy products and red and processed meats correlated with an earlier death. The authors concluded that low-fat, plant-based diets are not only beneficial for cancer prevention—they may also play a role in increasing survival time after diagnosis.

Longer survival was associated with total fruits and vegetables, and vegetables separately. Subgroup analyses showed only yellow and cruciferous vegetables to significantly favor survival. Conversely, a survival disadvantage was shown for meats, and specifically the red and cured/processed meats subgroups. An increased hazard ratio was also observed for the milk (all types) subgroup.

Dolecek TA, McCarthy BJ, Joslin CE, et al. Prediagnosis food patterns are associated with length of survival from epithelial ovarian cancer. *J Am Diet Assoc*. 2010;110:369-382.

Vegetables, Fruits, and Soy Help Prevent Breast Cancer

Prospective epidemiologic studies in Asian populations consistently show that soy is protective against breast cancer. According to a new study published in the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, consumption of soy, fruits, and vegetables helps reduce the risk of developing breast cancer. Postmenopausal women who consumed plenty of soy, fruits, and vegetables had a 30 percent lower risk of developing breast cancer, compared with those who consumed relatively little of these foods. The research was based on 34,028 women in the Singapore Chinese Health Study. The longer the women had consumed these healthful foods, the less chance they had of developing breast cancer.

Researchers had previously identified a “meat-dim sum” pattern characterized by meat, starch, and dim sum items and a “vegetable-fruit-soy” pattern characterized by cruciferous vegetables, fruit, and tofu items in a population-based cohort of Singapore Chinese initiated between 1993 and 1998. For the current study, 629 incident breast cancer cases had been diagnosed among the 34,028 women. With greater intake of the vegetable-fruit-soy dietary pattern, there was a dose-dependent trend for decreasing breast cancer risk among postmenopausal women. A stronger association for the vegetable-fruit-soy pattern was observed among postmenopausal women with over five years of follow-up. No trend was observed for a greater intake of the meat-dim sum dietary pattern and increased breast cancer risk.

Butler LM, Wu AH, Wang R, Koh WP, Yuan JM, Yu MC. A vegetable-fruit-soy dietary pattern protects against breast cancer among postmenopausal Singapore Chinese women. *Am J Clin Nutr*. Published ahead of print February 24, 2010. doi: 10.3945/ajcn.2009.28572.

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Research Shows Broad Array of Vitamin D Effects

Vitamin D insufficiency is prevalent among older adults and may be associated with higher risk for cardiovascular (CV) disease, mortality, depression, and cognitive deficits. Researchers reviewed published observational and experimental studies that explored the association between vitamin D insufficiency and CV disease, mortality, mood, and cognition with an emphasis on older adults. Publications had to include patients 65 years of age or older who had one or more recorded measurements of 25-hydroxyvitamin D (25[OH]D) or were receiving vitamin D supplementation. All case-control, cohort, and randomized studies were reviewed.

Forty-two case-control, cohort, and randomized trials were identified and included in the review. Based on these publications, the prevalence of vitamin D insufficiency (25[OH]D concentration <30 ng/mL) in community dwelling older adults (65 years of age and older) ranged from 40% to 100%. Epidemiologic data and several small randomized trials found a potential association between vitamin D deficiency and CV disease, including hypertension and ischemic heart disease. Although subgroup analyses of data from the Women's Health Initiative Randomized Trial (the largest randomized, placebo-controlled trial of vitamin D plus calcium therapy) did not find reductions in blood pressure, myocardial infarction, or CV disease-related deaths, intervention contamination limited the findings. Observational studies and a meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials found a mortality benefit associated with higher serum 25(OH)D concentrations or vitamin D(2) or D(3) supplementation (mean dose, 528 IU/day). Observational and small randomized trials found a potential benefit of sunlight or vitamin D on symptoms of depression and cognition, but the findings were limited by methodologic problems.

Barnard K, Colon-Emeric C. Extraskelatal effects of vitamin D in older adults: cardiovascular disease, mortality, mood, and cognition. *Am J Geriatr Pharmacother*. Feb 2010;8(1):4-33.