

Sugar and Cancer

What is Sugar?

Carbohydrates are an essential part of a diet and include foods such as grains, fruits, vegetables, dairy, desserts, and candy. When carbohydrates break down in the body, a simple sugar called glucose forms. Glucose is the simple sugar in your body that gives your cells energy.

Does sugar feed cancer?

No. Sugar “feeds” all the cells in your body. Cancer cells need sugar to grow just like healthy cells do, but sugar does not feed cancer cells any more than it feeds the other cells in your body.

Can I Eat Sugar?

Yes. Avoiding all foods with carbohydrates can be unsafe during cancer treatment. When you avoid all carbohydrates, you can weaken your body and make it harder to fight cancer. Avoiding all sugars can also cause stress. Stress can raise the amount of sugar in your blood and decrease how well your immune system works.

Even if there is no sugar in your diet, your body will still make sugar from the protein and fat you eat. Although sugar doesn't feed cancer, it is a good idea to limit the amount of added sugar you eat. Foods and beverages with added sugar include soda, sweet tea, candy, and baked goods. Eating a lot of added sugar can cause your body to produce more insulin. Insulin is a hormone your body produces to absorb glucose. Your body needs insulin to function, but it is unhealthy if you make too much of it.

Sugar can occur naturally in complex carbohydrates or be added to food. Eating a balanced diet with complex carbohydrates, protein, fiber, and fat will help your body process sugar in a healthy way. Complex carbohydrates such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains, beans, and lentils are broken down by the body slowly into simple sugars, which reduces the amount of insulin your body needs to absorb the simple sugars.

Tips to Manage Sugar in Your Diet

Read food labels. Avoid foods that have added sugar, brown sugar, corn syrup, high fructose corn syrup, or other sweeteners near the top of the ingredient list. Food labels

have been updated and now include a row that provides the amount of added sugars.

- Limit sugary drinks. Watch for soda, sports drinks, lattes, or sweetened teas with more than 10 grams of added sugar per serving. Choose water most often.
- Eat fruit instead of drinking fruit juice. If you drink juice, limit it to six ounces of 100% fruit juice once a day.
- Eat whole, unprocessed foods. Vegetables, fruit, whole grains, beans, legumes, nuts, and seeds have more fiber and are healthier for you.
- Limit desserts. If you eat dessert, stick to small servings a couple of times a week.
- Ask for advice. If you have a hard time getting enough nutrition during cancer treatment, talk to your doctor or dietitian.

Snacks that Help Manage Blood Sugar

These ideas help balance carbohydrates, protein, fat, and fiber.

- Almond butter and banana
- Fruit smoothie with milk and yogurt
- Greek yogurt and strawberries
- Hummus and whole wheat pita bread or veggies
- Nuts and dried fruit
- Peanut butter and crackers
- String cheese and vegetables
- Tuna salad and whole grain toast
- Turkey and avocado wrap
- Turkey chili soup and a baked potato
- Yogurt and apple slices

Dietitians from Huntsman Cancer Institute's Linda B. and Robert B. Wiggins Wellness and Integrative Health Center offer personalized nutrition counseling for patients and their families. To make an appointment or for more information, call 801-587-4585.