



# What You Need To Know About Colorectal Cancer & Nutrition

Patient Education & Empowerment Series



**gi cancers**  
ALLIANCE

A Powerful, Unified Voice For  
The Gastrointestinal Cancer Community

[www.GICancersAlliance.org](http://www.GICancersAlliance.org)



## Vitamin & Mineral Supplements

Nutrients such as vitamins and minerals are essential for our bodies to work properly. A balanced and varied diet is the best way to obtain nutrients, however there may be some instances where individuals with colon cancer may benefit from a vitamin or mineral supplement.

**It is important to talk to a health professional before taking any vitamins or supplements** as some medications and cancer treatments may interact with vitamins and supplements.

## Hydration

Prevent dehydration by drinking enough fluids during cancer treatment. Aim to drink 64 ounces of fluid daily. Avoid drinking large amounts of caffeinated beverages as too much caffeine can lead to dehydration.

## Managing Specific Nutrition Related Symptoms

Individuals with colon or rectal cancer may experience symptoms unique to the type of treatment received. Common symptoms can include unintentional weight loss and loss of appetite, feeling full quickly (early satiety), fatigue, nausea and vomiting, constipation, diarrhea, gas and bloating, mouth sores (mucositis), and taste changes. It's best to speak to your registered dietitian for personalized recommendations to combat these symptoms and to prevent unwanted weight loss.

### Unintentional weight loss and loss of appetite:

- Eat small frequent meals (5-6 times/day)
- Take advantage of times you feel stronger during the day to eat (often earlier in the day)
- Make sure surroundings are conducive to eating (low stress)
- Set goals for eating (e.g., frequency of meals, portion size goals)
- Consider incorporating nutritional supplement drinks (e.g., Ensure, Boost) if recommended by your healthcare team
- Aim for high protein and calorie foods to help prevent muscle loss

### **Early Satiety:**

- Eat small frequent meals
- Avoid high fat and fiber foods that can slow digestion
- Drink liquids separately from eating solid foods
- Activity after eating such as walking can stimulate digestion

### **Fatigue:**

- Choose foods high in protein and calories which provide energy
- Eat small frequent meals (5-6 times/day)
- Consider incorporating nutritional supplement drinks (e.g., Ensure, Boost) if recommended by your healthcare team
- Light exercise can combat fatigue and prevent muscle loss
- Maintain adequate hydration of 64oz or more of water or fluids

### **Taste Alterations:**

- Maintain adequate hydration of 64oz or more of water or fluids (mix water with some juice or add some lemon or lime to make fluids more palatable)
- Practice frequent oral care; before and after meals in addition to morning and night
- Try rinsing with 1-2 oz of baking soda rinse before and after meals (recipe for baking soda rinse: 1 quart water,  $\frac{3}{4}$  teaspoon salt and 1 teaspoon baking soda)
- If experiencing a metallic taste, use plastic silverware instead of metal silverware
- Try sugar free lemon drops, gum, or mints
- Use different seasonings to enhance flavors such salt, sugar, cinnamon, nutmeg, onion, garlic, chili powder, oregano, rosemary, mint, etc.

### **Sore Mouth and Throat (Mucositis):**

- Choose soft, moisture rich, and bland foods
- Add extra butter, oil, gravy, or sauce for more ease swallowing foods
- Try pureeing foods with extra liquids for a smoother consistency
- Take small bites of food at a time and chew foods thoroughly
- Avoid coarse, dry, spicy, salty, or acidic foods
- Practice frequent oral care but avoid alcohol containing mouth washes
- Using a straw can divert liquids away from sores in the mouth
- Avoid hot temperature foods, choose room temperature or cool foods and liquids

### **Nausea and Vomiting:**

- Eat small frequent meals (5-6 times/day) to avoid having an empty stomach which can make nausea and vomiting worse
- Avoid greasy and spicy foods, and foods with strong odors
- Choose bland foods that are easier to digest (like crackers, potatoes, rice)
- Try ginger (in the form of chews or teas, add ginger root in soups)
- Maintain adequate hydration of 64oz or more of water or fluids and supplement with an oral rehydration formula to replace lost electrolytes
- Choose foods and beverages rich in potassium (e.g., coconut water, bananas, potatoes without skin, fruit juices) to help replenish lost potassium from vomiting

## **Constipation:**

- Maintain adequate hydration of 64oz or more of water or fluids
- If allowed, choose foods rich in dietary fiber such as bran flakes, whole grain breads and crackers, fresh fruits, vegetables, and legumes
- Increase physical activity to stimulate the digestive tract (e.g., walking)

## **Diarrhea:**

- Eat small frequent meals
- Maintain adequate hydration of 64oz or more of water or fluids and supplement with an oral rehydration formula to replace lost electrolytes
- Avoid caffeine and limit lactose
- Choose foods and beverages rich in potassium to help replenish lost potassium from diarrhea
- Follow a low residue diet and avoid insoluble fibers such as cauliflower, cabbage, onions, and broccoli
- Choose foods with pectin and soluble fiber such as oatmeal, oranges, bananas, applesauce, peeled white potatoes, pearl barley, and white rice

## **Gas and Bloating:**

- Eat and drink slowly
- Eat small frequent meals
- Avoid lactose containing milk
- Avoid chewing gum and using a straw which may introduce air
- Avoid gas forming foods like beans, broccoli, cabbage, and onions
- Consider probiotic rich foods with prebiotic fibers
- Consume adequate fluids to aid in digestion of fibers
- Limit insoluble fiber
- Try ginger and peppermint tea
- Hydrate adequately

# Nutrition Guidelines after Colon Surgery

**Patients with more advanced colorectal cancer may require surgery to remove all or part of their colon that contains the cancer, known as a colectomy.** Following removal of the cancerous portions of the colon the surgeon will reconnect the healthy portions of the remaining colon or rectum. However, when it is not possible to reconnect the healthy portions of the remaining colon or rectum, an ostomy may be created. An ostomy is a surgically created opening in the wall of the abdomen that is connected to the remaining colon to divert waste products out of the body. Individuals who receive a colectomy with or without an ostomy may need to follow a modified diet.

It is recommended that individuals seek counseling by a registered dietitian for personalized nutritional guidance. These are general guidelines to follow after undergoing a colectomy:

|         |   |   |
|---------|---|---|
| Phase 1 | For <b>1-2 days</b> after surgery follow a clear liquid diet until cleared by the physician to advance to phase 2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Drink 8 to 10 (8oz <b>glasses of water</b> daily)</li><li>• Include <b>protein rich foods</b> to promote wound healing and recovery</li></ul> |
| Phase 2 | For approximately <b>4-6 weeks</b> after surgery follow a low fiber and low residue diet                          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Eat <b>small frequent meals</b> 5-6 times per day</li></ul>   |
| Phase 3 | After <b>4-6 weeks</b> gradually advance to a regular diet by slowly reintroducing foods with fiber               |   |

# Special considerations for individuals with an ostomy

**Aim to follow a low fiber diet for the first few weeks after surgery to prevent discomfort while your colon is healing.** You can slowly resume your regular diet after speaking with your physician. Consult with a dietitian for guidance if experiencing gas or odors, stools that are too loose or too firm.

## Adding foods back into your diet:

- Add 1 new food every few days. Start with foods you were able to eat without problems before surgery.
- Keep a list of foods that cause gas, odor or diarrhea. If a food causes symptoms, avoid it for 2 to 3 weeks. Then, try it again in small amounts to see how your body reacts

## Important tips:

- Consume small frequent meals 5-6 times per day
- Chew thoroughly and eat slowly
- Drink 8 to 10 (8oz) glasses of water daily
- Choose bland, low-fiber foods
- Follow a high protein diet
- Avoid certain foods that can trigger discomfort (such as high fat and spicy foods, sugary foods, sugar alcohols, and dairy containing lactose)



# Low Fiber and Low Residue Diet

(In general, aim to consume less than 10 grams of fiber per day on a low fiber diet.)

| Foods Allowed   | Foods to Avoid  |
|---|---|
| <b>Grains</b>   |   |
| <p>Products made with white flour or refined and enriched flour such as white bread, sourdough, naan, cream of wheat, bagels, pancakes, waffles, croissants, rolls, crackers (like saltines, graham crackers, ritz), pretzels, flour tortillas, muffins, pizza dough, and pasta.</p> <p>Products made with white rice such as rice cakes, Rice Krispies, puffed rice, rice chex, rice noodles, cream of rice, rice pilaf.</p> <p>Other foods such as corn flakes, melba toast, couscous</p> | <p>Products made with whole wheat or whole grains such as whole wheat bread, whole wheat pasta, shredded wheat, bran flakes, grape nuts</p> <p>Grains made with nuts or seeds, bran, wheat germ.</p> <p>Other fiber rich grains like farro, barley, brown and black rice, wild rice, oats, granola, museli, quinoa, teff, wheatberries, buckwheat (kasha)</p> |
| <b>Dairy</b>  |   |
| <p>Lactose-free labeled dairy such as milk, yogurt, kefir, ice cream, and cottage cheese, powdered milk.</p> <p>Low lactose cheeses and dairy like Greek yogurt, hard cheeses (such as aged cheddar, parmesan, swiss, and Colby). Cream cheese and soft cheeses like feta, camembert, gouda, and mozzarella.</p> <p>Non-dairy milks such as soy, almond, cashew, coconut, and rice.</p>   | <p>Large amounts of high lactose dairy such as buttermilk, chocolate, creamy/cheesy sauces, custard, ice cream, milk (cow's, goat's, sheep's, condensed, evaporated), soft cheeses (cottage, ricotta, etc.), sour cream</p> <p>Yogurt or ice cream with seeds, berries, or nuts</p>   |
| <b>Vegetables</b>   |   |

| Foods Allowed   | Foods to Avoid   |
|---|--|
| <p>Tender well-cooked fresh or canned vegetables without seeds, stems, or skins such as: carrots, green or wax beans, potatoes, yams, zucchini, spinach, mushrooms lima beans, pumpkin, asparagus tips.</p> <p>Strained vegetable juices without pulp or spices such as vegetable/tomato puree/sauces.</p>  | <p>Raw or steamed vegetables, fried vegetables, vegetables with seeds, skins, or stems such as artichokes, collard greens, kale, asparagus, broccoli, beets, brussels sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower, celery, corn, cucumbers, eggplant, green peas, lettuce, mushrooms, okra, tomatoes, sauerkraut, winter squash, peas and onions, potato skins, legumes such as lentils and kidney beans.</p>                    |
| <b>Fruits</b>   |  |
| <p>Soft canned or cooked fruit without seed or skins such as applesauce, peeled apples and pears, small amounts of ripe banana, small amounts of honeydew or cantaloupe, watermelon, fruit cocktail, clementine, peeled peaches, peeled plums, peeled nectarines, peeled apricot, pineapple</p> <p>Strained or clear fruit juices NOT made from whole fruit like lemon, lime</p> <p>fruit puree/sauces (without pulp, no skins, no seeds)</p> | <p>Most raw fruit including avocado, apples with skin, pears with skin, whole bananas, plantains, grapes, all berries, cherries, dates, figs, grapes, guava, kiwi, papaya, mango, pineapple, pomegranate, orange, grapefruit,</p> <p>All dried fruits especially prunes, prune juice, and raisins.</p> <p>Blended smoothies made from whole fruits (e.g. Naked®, Bolthouse®, or others made from whole fruit).</p> |
| <b>Proteins</b>   |  |

| Foods Allowed  | Foods to Avoid  |
|--|---|
| <p>Tender, ground, well-cooked meats (baked, broiled, grilled or steamed), poultry, and fish.</p> <p>Eggs, tofu, smooth nut and seed butters (like almond, peanut, and sunflower seed butter)</p>  | <p>Tough fibrous meats with gristle, processed meats including sausage, salami, cold cuts, and hot dogs.</p> <p>All beans (like black, refried, pinto, kidney, lima, and lentils), nuts, chunky nut butters, seeds (coconut, chia seed, flaxseed), peas, hummus.</p>  |
| Desserts, fats, and other foods  |   |
| <p>Chocolate, pudding, plain cakes, cookies (without whole grains, dried fruit, berries, bran, nuts, seeds, or coconut), sherbet, popsicles, clear jellies and gelatin, hard candy, marshmallows, plain chocolate, sugar, honey and syrup, plain pudding, custard, plain ice cream.</p> <p>Margarine, butter, cream, oils, mayonnaise, cream, gravies, salad dressings without seeds, sour cream, ketchup, mustard, pepper, BBQ sauce, soy sauce, salt, vinegar, spices, cooked herbs, bouillon, broth, and soups made with recommended foods.</p> | <p>Anything made with whole-grain flour, bran, seeds, nuts, coconut, dried fruit.</p> <p>For example, bran muffins, granola bars, fiber bars, brownies or cookies with nuts, popcorn.</p> <p>Jam, jelly with seeds, marmalade, and preserves.</p> <p>Sugar alcohols (isomalt, mannitol, sorbitol, xylitol).</p> <p>Pickles, olives, relish and horseradish.</p> |

**For additional information, recipes and healthy nutrition ideas, visit: [www.gicancersalliance.org/Colorectal-Cancer-Nutrition](http://www.gicancersalliance.org/Colorectal-Cancer-Nutrition)**

*All information and tools presented are intended for educational and informational purposes only, and should not be considered a substitute for professional medical expertise. Please seek advice from a qualified healthcare professional before changing or modifying your diet.*

Please visit our colorectal cancer advocacy partner websites for additional education, support, research and nutrition information.



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*for the Cure of Gastrointestinal Cancers*

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