

PERFECT PAIRINGS

Great food combinations for cancer fighters.

BY KELSEY ALLEN



Some foods seem to be made for each other: peanut butter and jelly, mashed potatoes and gravy, spaghetti and meatballs. But beyond tasting great, when combined, some foods pack an extra punch of nutrients.

Eating well is essential for cancer fighters because malnutrition can lead to complications such as muscle wasting, nutrient deficiencies, delays in treatment and slow wound healing. When your nutritional status is compromised, so is your immune system. But we can help improve our well-being by making smart food choices, says Jen Koffs, RD, LDN, CSO, CNSC clinical oncology dietitian at Cancer Treatment Centers of America® (CTCA) in Philadelphia.

If you're ready to match-make in your kitchen, here are some of Koffs' winning combinations.

SWEET POTATOES & OLIVE OIL

Sweet potatoes are packed with carotenoids, a phytochemical that works as an antioxidant and improves immune system response. Carotenoids are also precursors to fat-soluble vitamins, such as vitamins A, D, E and K, so adding a little fat—such as a drizzle of olive oil—helps you absorb beneficial carotenoids.

Skip the cinnamon and sugar, Koffs says. Instead, season with other spices, herbs and garlic, another cancer-fighting food.

CURRY & BLACK PEPPER

Many curries include turmeric, which contains curcumin, an anti-inflammatory and antioxidant compound that promotes cancer cell death and slows the growth of tumors. When combined with piperine, a compound found in black pepper, curcumin is more

bioavailable (or easily absorbed).

CHICKEN & SALAD

Iron deficiency anemia can be a side effect among people being treated for cancer. The good news? Your body easily absorbs heme iron, found in animal products such as chicken. But non-heme iron, found in plant foods, is harder to absorb. To maximize iron absorption, consume foods that are rich in vitamin C, such as cabbage, tomatoes and green and red bell peppers, at the same meal. ●

THE FAB 5

Get to know five foods that help alleviate treatment side effects.



- 1 With antioxidant and anti-inflammatory effects, ginger is often used to treat nausea. Try ginger tea, pickled ginger or candied ginger, says Koffs. She also recommends throwing minced or grated ginger into a stir-fry, stew or smoothie.
- 2 Taking antibiotics can negatively impact the flora that lives in your gut, Koffs says. Fermented foods such as yogurt, kombucha tea, kefir, miso, kimchi and sauerkraut can recolonize the gut with beneficial bacteria.
- 3 If you're just not hungry for anything but know you need a caloric jolt, try walnuts. They contain antioxidant properties and omega-3 fat.
- 4 If everything tastes terrible—another treatment side effect—Koffs recommends eating fruit, especially citrus fruits. Bonus: Many fruits, such as apples and blueberries, are high in fiber, which helps ease the constipation that's brought on by some cancer treatments and pain medications.
- 5 Koffs' can't skip: water. Vomiting and diarrhea can be brought on by cancer treatments, so it is important to stay hydrated.



Although research shows improved absorption of nutrients when specific foods are paired, don't stress about picking the perfect combination at every meal.

"Ultimately, it's about consuming a colorful variety of nutrient-dense foods, such as fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds and legumes, over the course of the week."

—Jen Koffs, RD, LDN,
CSO, CNSC, clinical
oncology dietitian at
CTCA® in Philadelphia

RECIPES



Sweet Potato Wedges With Rosemary

Makes 4 servings

What you need:

- 3 small sweet potatoes, peeled and sliced lengthwise in 8 wedges
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh rosemary and a few sprigs for garnish
- ½ teaspoon garlic powder
- ½ teaspoon dry mustard powder
- 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- Salt

What you do:

Preheat oven to 450 degrees F. Place wedges in large bowl. Add rosemary, garlic powder, mustard and oil. Toss to coat well. Arrange potatoes on baking sheet, making sure not to overlap. Bake 15 minutes. Turn wedges over, and bake 15 minutes or until potatoes are soft and beginning to brown. Lightly season to taste with salt. Garnish with fresh rosemary sprigs. Serve immediately.



Curried Pumpkin Soup

Makes 6 cups

What you need:

- 3 tablespoons butter
- 1 medium sweet onion, small dice
- 4 medium carrots, small dice
- 3 ribs celery, small dice
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 1½ cups vegetable stock
- 2 teaspoons madras curry powder
- 3 cups roasted fresh pumpkin, mashed
- 2 tablespoons fresh parsley, minced
- 2 cups half-and-half
- 2 tablespoons chives, minced
- Salt and pepper to taste

What you do:

In a large saucepan, melt the butter over medium-low heat. Add the chopped vegetables and sauté until tender. Add the garlic and the stock; bring to a simmer. Cover and allow to simmer for 20 minutes. Add curry powder, pumpkin and parsley. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Stir in the half-and-half until well blended. Using a blender, carefully blend the mixture in batches. Garnish with minced chives, and enjoy.



Lemon-Herbed Grilled Chicken Breast

Makes 4 servings

What you need:

- 4 boneless, skinless chicken breasts
- 3 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 lemon, zest of
- 3 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
- ¼ cup extra virgin olive oil
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon black pepper

What you do:

Combine everything but the chicken in a large container and mix well. Add the chicken to the marinade, cover and refrigerate for a minimum of one hour. Preheat grill 10 minutes prior to grilling. Cook for about five minutes on each side. Pair with a fresh salad.



EAT WELL
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