

Traditional Chinese Medicine: Cancer-Preventing Foods

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Cancer-preventing foods which are popular in China include green tea, cabbage, shiitake mushrooms, garlic, kelp, carrots, and cauliflower.

Green Tea, the most popular drink in China, Japan and other Asian countries, contains powerful anti-cancer substances called catechins. Many studies show that green tea can dramatically block the development of various cancers. Epigallocatechin gallate (one of the most potent catechins) is found in the highest concentrations in green tea. People confuse green tea with black tea, Oolong tea, Jasmine tea, and many other Asian teas. All tea is made from leaves picked from the same plant—the difference is in the processing. Green tea leaves are simply picked and sun-dried; other teas are either fermented or cooked. It is the lack of processing that makes green tea contain the most potent anti-cancer agents. A leading physician, Dr. Hirota Fujiki, at Japan's National Cancer Center Research Institute, claims that drinking green tea could be one of the most practical methods of cancer prevention available to the general public at present.

Cabbage, the most popular vegetable in the northern part of China, can be found in many traditional dishes, including stir-fry vegetables and dumplings. The Chinese value it, not only for its good taste, but also for its wonderful anti-cancer effect. Studies show that cabbage can speed up the metabolism of estrogen in the body. It is thought that slower metabolism of estrogen promotes breast cancer. Another very interesting study done on cabbage concerned guinea pigs who received high doses of radiation. The study showed that all of the guinea pigs who were exposed to high levels of radiation and did not have cabbage in their diet died; but the group of guinea pigs who ate cabbage had a very high survival rate. This study indicates that cancer patients who are receiving radiation therapy would be wise to include substantial portions of cabbage in their diet.

Shiitake Mushroom. This brown and beefy-tasting mushroom has been used in Asian gourmet cooking for centuries as a substitute for meat. Its taste and texture are very different from that of regular mushrooms. It has gained fame as an immune system booster, widely recommended to cancer and AIDS patients. The biochemical in the shiitake mushroom that has been proven to augment immune system activity is called lenitan. Today it is possible to find shiitake mushrooms in many supermarkets and Asian groceries in the dried form. Fresh ones are also available in some co-ops. Shiitakes are delicious and can be prepared in a variety of ways: cooked or steamed with rice or noodles; or added to stir-fry and soups.

Garlic. As a food and a spice, garlic is used widely in both the East and the West. Scientific studies show that garlic can "deactivate" carcinogens, prevent the growth of cancerous tumors, and stimulate the formation of glutathione which detoxifies foreign materials. Garlic contains allicin which has antibiotic and anti-fungal properties. People call it a natural chemotherapy drug because of the way it destroys cancerous cells. It is especially preventive of colon and stomach cancers. One of garlic's components, ajoene, is very toxic to malignant cells. The maximum benefit is achieved by eating raw garlic.

Kelp is a seaweed which tops the list of therapeutic Chinese foods for its anti-cancer properties. It is rich in many minerals and other special nutrients such as iodine. Traditional Chinese medicine believes that kelp can soften and reduce hard masses. It is also popularly used for weight control in China. It is so popular in Asian cuisine that it is considered a necessity in the Chinese and Japanese diet. Kelp soap, kelp shampoo, and kelp hair conditioners are extensively used in modern China.

Carrots. Most people already know that carrots contain high levels of beta carotene, and that beta carotene has an anti-cancer effect. Carrots are widely consumed around the world, but in many countries, especially in the West, people eat them raw. Experiments show that eating lightly-cooked carrots is much more beneficial than eating raw carrots, which confirms the ancient wisdom in traditional Chinese medicine. Traditional Chinese medicine practitioners have always recommended that their patients eat lightly-cooked carrots in order to get the best nutritional absorption. Recent research by Dr. Xiangdong Wang at Tufts University shows that beta carotene can change in the human body into a substance called retinoic acid, which is widely used to treat cancers.

Cauliflower. In ancient times, Chinese medicine texts set out the theory that foods which look like tumors have an anti-tumor effect. In the West, the theory that "like treats like" is called the "Doctrine of Signatures." Cauliflower, which looks exactly like a cancer tumor, has long been a folk remedy against cancer. Recently, its effects on cancer have been proven scientifically: it contains many cancer-fighting, hormone-regulating compounds, and is especially good for the prevention of breast and colon cancers.