

Podcast Script
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Phytochemicals

Phytochemicals are great little compounds in foods that have HUGE health benefits! When I read about phytochemicals and their ability to prevent cancer, I realized how powerful our diet can be and how we can have a positive impact on our health through nutrition.

You're already familiar with phytochemicals because they give fruits and vegetables - and grains and beans - their scent, color, and flavor. So, these qualities in plants that you've known all along also act as antioxidants, help prevent cancer - and slow its growth, boost our immune system, and more.

When people talk about phytochemicals they might be referring to a **class** of phytochemicals - like isoflavones and polyphenols. But, they also might be talking about a **specific** phytochemical - so you might hear the words resveratrol, beta-carotene, lycopene, or lutein --- just to name a few.

It's important to remember that 1 plant can contain more than one phytochemical so you might see a fruit, vegetable, bean, or grain promoted as having multiple benefits- and that's perfectly fine.

To get the most from phytochemicals, it's important to eat a variety of plant-based foods - truly: eat a rainbow! And don't stop at fruits and vegetables, be sure to include different grains and beans too. Whole grains and peanuts are polyphenols; and they may prevent cancer and inflammation, they've also been shown to have antioxidant properties. Bran, wheat, nuts, soybeans, and soy products might slow the growth of cancer and have antioxidant properties.

And remember, antioxidants help fight free radicals which occur naturally in our body, they're actually pretty important in a lot of metabolic processes. But when the concentration of free radicals becomes too large, problems begin. Antioxidants help neutralize free radicals.

Just as it's important to eat a variety of plant-based foods; it's also important to eat them in different stages of cooked - for lack of a better term. Some phytochemicals are active when you eat the plant raw, some are active when the plant's been cooked.

Lastly, it's important to try to get as many nutrients from real food, rather than supplements. Phytochemicals in food are more easily absorbed and used by our bodies than those you can buy in a supplement. And, remember -- the FDA doesn't regulate supplements so there's no oversight of the purity of the supplements that are on the market.

There are some nice sites that provide great information on phytochemicals. Check out credible sources like the National Cancer Institute, the American Institute for Cancer Research, the Linus Pauling Institute, Fruits and Veggies More Matters, Nutrition.gov, and the Food and Nutrition Information Center to read more.

Sources:

http://www.aicr.org/reduce-your-cancer-risk/diet/elements_phytochemicals.html

<http://nutrition.ucdavis.edu/content/infosheets/fact-pro-phytochemical.pdf>

<http://lpi.oregonstate.edu/infocenter/phytochemicals.html>

<http://www.fruitsandveggiesmorematters.org/what-are-phytochemicals>

<http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/factsheet/prevention/antioxidants>

<http://cancer.stanford.edu/information/nutritionAndCancer/reduceRisk/phyto.html>

<http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/factsheet/diet/cruciferous-vegetables>