

Cancer prevention and organic food - is there a connection?

BY JAKE COLE

How much cancer is preventable?

Cancer is Canada's number one killer. Some 75,000 Canadians will die from it this year, and about 170,000 will contract it for the first time. It is predicted that nearly half of all males and four in ten females will eventually get cancer, while one of four of us will ultimately die from it. These are not great odds. Yet there are credible sources stating that 80% of cancers are preventable. We think it's at least that much and even more. It has been said that we all have cancer in our bodies, or at least the potential to develop cancer. But it has also been said that very little cancer is actually inherited. A cancer diagnosis does not need to be considered inevitable, nor just a case of bad luck.

We believe that eating a plant-based, whole-food diet is one of the best ways to prevent cancer. We also believe that food should be, as much as possible, organic.

Who is Prevent Cancer Now?

We are the national, non-profit organization, Prevent Cancer Now. Our mission is to reduce or eliminate the preventable causes of cancer. We do that with focused research, directed campaigns, public education, and efforts to change public policy and regulations. One of our campaigns is called "Organic Nation" and it's about making organic food not only a mainstay in personal eating habits but also an agricultural priority across our country. One of our key projects underway here in the Ottawa area is a free, public lecture series on cancer and what we can do to prevent it. It's called, "Prevention Is The Cure" and is currently available for community groups, workplaces, schools, churches, and basically any place where people meet.

Can organic food prevent cancer?

It should seem obvious that foods grown and raised without synthetic fertilizers, hormones, and pesticides would be inherently healthier for people. The increasing popularity of organic foods in this country and across the world indicates that more consumers feel that way, as more of them turn to organic food choices. Also, an increasing number of health practitioners are promoting organic food as the best choice, not only to fight cancer, but other diseases as well, and to promote overall better health and vitality. Perhaps one of the strongest sources of support for organics comes from the President's Cancer Panel in the US which, in its latest annual report, states that "the true burden of environmentally induced cancer has been grossly underestimated." The report further goes on to promote organic food choices. It's understood that the defining study, proving that organic food choices are healthier for us, has yet to be published. However, there are some who say, given the long gestation period for cancer, often several decades, that we should not wait for "the dead bodies" to start piling up before taking action. Prevent Cancer Now believes that there is enough evidence proving that organic food can help stave off cancer, can help improve cancer treatments, and can help avoid a recurrence.

What are the best ways to help prevent cancer right now?

To find out, attend one of our presentations in Ottawa if you can or check our web site. Here are but a few suggestions:

- Reduce meat and dairy in the diet.

- Eat more fruit and vegetables - raw and organic are best.
- Use vinegar, baking soda, and water for most household cleaning jobs.
- Get more active and get outdoors as much as possible (That includes gardening!!).

There are more cancer prevention tips and other resources available on our website <http://preventcancer.ca/>

Should all of our food choices be organic?

Certain non-organic foods contain more pesticides than others. Some, like strawberries, tend to carry higher levels than others such as asparagus, which typically carries little or no pesticide residues. A US-based organization, the Environmental Working Group, has come up with a "Clean 15" list of the fruits and vegetables that consumers can buy non-organic without having to worry about significant pesticide residue. They've also produced a "Dirty Dozen" list, identifying the ones you should buy organic since the ones grown conventionally carry high levels of pesticide residues. While based on US data, such a list is likely useful in Canada too.

What's the bottom line here?

Many pesticides used in foods are known carcinogens, that is, they can cause cancer. Foods grown organically will be pesticide-free and will tend to be more nutritious, thus helping us to be healthier and to be able to fight off cancer and/or stop it from developing. While you can, at the individual level, freely choose to eat organic food, there is much to be done collectively. At the community/national level, we need to get corporations, institutions, and governments to take steps to dramatically reduce cancer-causing environmental contaminants in our air, our food, and our water. More than anything, cancer is an environmental disease. As one specific demand, we want to see a major increase in the effort to prevent cancer (less than 2% of all publicly funded cancer research is dedicated to primary prevention, as opposed to early detection, treatment, and support).

We should not accept cancer rates as they are today, and we must not accept the disease and its sufferers as simply collateral damage as our society moves forward toward vague, economic goals. The only way cancer will ever be beaten is to prevent it!

Here's a link to a YouTube video that is lighthearted yet carries a strong message about organic food and how it can positively affect your health and the health of our planet <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SCA6P9IsEfw>

Jake Cole is the Co-chair of Prevent Cancer Now, a national, non-profit organization dedicated to identifying and eliminating/reducing the preventable causes of cancer. Its website is www.preventcancer.ca

The Dirty Dozen

- Celery
- Peaches
- Strawberries
- Apples
- Blueberries (domestically grown)
- Nectarines
- Bell peppers
- Spinach
- Collard greens/kale
- Cherries
- Potatoes
- Grapes (imported)

The Clean 15

- Onions
- Avocados
- Sweet corn
- Pineapples
- Mangoes
- Sweet peas
- Asparagus
- Kiwi
- Cabbage
- Eggplant
- Cantaloupe
- Watermelon
- Grapefruit
- Sweet potatoes
- Honeydew melon