

# Nutrition Tips for Colorectal Cancer



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The mission of God's Love We Deliver is to improve the health and well-being of men, women and children living with HIV/AIDS, cancer and other life-altering illnesses by alleviating hunger and malnutrition. We prepare and deliver nutritious, high-quality meals to people who are unable to provide or prepare meals for themselves.

We offer illness-specific nutrition education and counseling to our clients and families, care providers and other service organizations. All our services are provided free of charge without regard to income.

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# Introduction

**Colorectal cancer (CRC)** is the third most common type of cancer in the United States. While it is more commonly diagnosed in men than women, risk increases with age, and it most frequently occurs among people aged 65-74 years. In addition to age, certain racial or ethnic groups, such as African Americans and Ashkenazi Jews, are at increased risk for CRC. Colorectal cancer starts in either the colon or rectum, which, along with the anal canal, makes up the large intestine, and is at the end of the digestive system.

While increased screening over the past 20 years has led to a decline in both new cases and death rates from colorectal cancer, it is estimated that there will be 140,250 new cases in 2018. Treatment options for CRC include surgery, chemotherapy, radiation therapy, cryosurgery, radiofrequency ablation, and targeted therapy.

Whichever path you are on, building healthy nutrition habits is essential to recovery from CRC and prevention of recurrence. This booklet will help you learn more about your nutritional needs and guide your food choices.

# Nutritional Concerns During Treatment



Following a healthy diet is extremely important during colorectal cancer treatment and beyond. All forms of treatment place huge demands on the body, therefore eating a variety of foods can aid in:

- Maintaining weight
- Coping better with treatment and its side effects
- Assisting in the body's repair and recovery

During this time, the way your body uses nutrients may change, causing your energy and protein needs to increase. Eating well can be challenging due to the illness and its side effects. You can stay on track by:

- Following a balanced diet that includes a variety of foods. Use the meal planning section on page 18.
- Eating smaller meals more frequently, especially if you get full quickly.
- Focusing on protein-rich foods first at meal time.

See page 10 for help with specific issues.



## PROTEINS

Protein helps the body repair and fight infection. It is a good idea to include a protein source at each meal or snack. Good sources of protein include poultry, fish, eggs, nuts, nut butters, dairy products, seeds, legumes, and tofu.

## PROCESSED AND RED MEAT

Recent studies suggest that greater red meat and processed meat intake is associated with higher risk of colorectal cancer. Therefore, many health care professionals recommend avoiding cured and smoked meats due to the carcinogenic (cancer causing) chemicals that they contain. Cured and smoked meats typically include deli meats, hot dogs, sausages, ham, and bacon. Limiting intake of red meat to less than 18 ounces per week is also recommended.

## HEALTHY FATS

The type of fat you eat is more important than the amount, and unhealthy fats should be replaced with healthy fats. There are two types of healthy fats: monounsaturated and polyunsaturated. Good sources of both include:

- **Monounsaturated:** olive, canola, and peanut oils; nuts and nut butters; and avocado.
- **Polyunsaturated:** Omega-3 fatty acids, members of the polyunsaturated category, are anti-inflammatory and may have additional health benefits. They are found in cold water fish (canned or wild salmon, sardines, mackerel, canned light tuna), walnuts, and flax seeds.



## WHAT IS INFLAMMATION?

Inflammation is the immune system's response to irritation, injury, or infection. There are two types of inflammation: acute and chronic.

**Acute inflammation** is protective and restorative; without it, wounds and infections would not heal.

**Chronic inflammation** is damaging. When the inflammatory response continues, chronic inflammation generates harmful reactions that destroy cells and can harm the body. Linked to many serious health problems including colorectal cancer, this type of inflammation is often hidden and unknown.

### FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

Fruits and vegetables are excellent sources of fiber, vitamins, minerals, and phytochemicals (plant chemicals). Found naturally in plants, phytochemicals have many promising health benefits such as reducing inflammation. Fruits and vegetables should be eaten in abundance and in any form. Cooked fruits and vegetables may be better tolerated if you are experiencing diarrhea.

### GRAINS

Providing the body with energy, vitamins, minerals, and fiber, grains and grain products include bread, oats, cereals, pasta, cornmeal, and rice. During treatment, if you are able to tolerate high fiber foods, choose whole-wheat bread, whole-wheat pasta, brown rice, oatmeal, and quinoa. These contain the entire grain kernel and are important sources of fiber, some B vitamins, iron, magnesium, and selenium. If you cannot handle fiber during treatment, consume refined grains such as white rice, ready-to-eat cereals, and enriched (white) bread.



## NUTRITIONAL SUPPLEMENTS

Colorectal cancer patients may experience weight loss while receiving treatment and during recovery. In addition to food, oral supplements are a good option for maintaining weight when you are not eating as much as you used to, are too tired to eat, cannot eat enough to meet your needs, or are just not interested in food.

Generally high in calories and protein, oral supplements or nutritional shakes can be designed specifically for those affected by cancer and other illnesses. One option for those with colorectal cancer is an oral supplement that contains the fatty acid EPA, which has been shown to have anti-inflammatory effects on the body and may help prevent cell damage. EPA can also be found in omega-3 rich foods like cold-water fish and seaweed; plants such as flax seeds, walnuts, or canola oil; or in fish oil supplements.

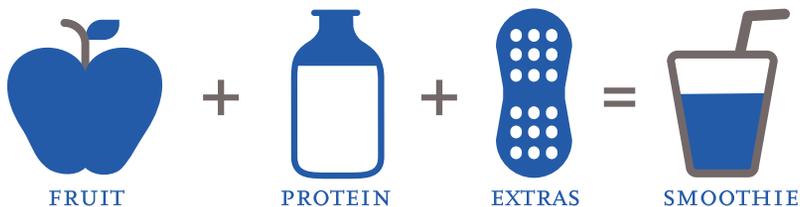
It is always advised to speak to your doctor or registered dietitian nutritionist before taking any supplements, as they may recommend a specific type for your needs.

Homemade smoothies are another great option for people needing more calories and protein. For individuals with lactose intolerance, cow's milk may be replaced with soy, rice, almond, or lactase-treated milks for better acceptance. Even though most oral supplements are lactose-free, check the label/ingredient list.



## HOW TO BUILD A SMOOTHIE

Mix and match your favorite ingredients to create a delicious and nutritious drink!



### **Fruit** (select 1 or 2)

- 1 cup blueberries
- 1/2 banana
- 1 cup strawberries
- 1 cup raspberries

### **Protein** (select 1)

- 3/4 cup yogurt
- 3/4 cup milk or soymilk
- 12 oz silken tofu (1 box)

### **Extras** (select 1)

- 2 T finely ground nuts
- 1 T peanut butter
- 1 T ground flax seeds
- 1 T wheat germ

## **Directions**

1. If using fresh berries, wash well.
2. Place 1/2 cup of ice cubes in blender.
3. Combine all other ingredients in blender.
4. Blend until smooth.



**Vitamins and Minerals:** Vitamins and minerals are needed by our bodies to perform necessary functions including growth, development, and repair, and are found in the food we eat, especially fruits and vegetables. The best sources of vitamins and minerals are food, but for those who cannot eat well for extended periods of time, a multivitamin that contains 100% of daily requirements may be useful. Taking large doses of vitamins and minerals during cancer treatment is not advised, and may have a negative effect on treatment. Consult with your health care provider before taking any type of supplement.

#### PROBIOTICS

Our gastrointestinal tract hosts billions of good bacteria called probiotics that provide our body with multiple benefits, including cancer protection. These live organisms may increase the rate of cancer cell death, prevent cancer cell migration to other tissues in the body, and support the body's immune system. Additionally, patients who consume probiotics during chemotherapy have a better treatment response, including less diarrhea, lower levels of abdominal discomfort, fewer chemotherapy doses, and overall fewer hospitalizations.

Most experts suggest a daily dose of 1-15 billion colony-forming units (CFUs) either from diet or supplementation. Foods rich in probiotics include yogurt, fermented foods like miso and sauerkraut, or those fortified with live cultures. If taking a supplement, check product label for adequate probiotic dosage. Keep probiotic supplements in a cool, dry place. Some probiotics may require refrigeration in order to keep these microorganisms



viable. Consult with your health care provider or registered dietitian nutritionist before taking any supplements.

## FIBER FACTS

Fiber is the part of plant foods that our bodies cannot digest or break down. Foods high in fiber include fruits, vegetables, dry beans and peas, nuts and seeds, and whole grain breads and cereals. Fiber is not found in animal foods (meat, milk, eggs). There are two basic types of fiber: soluble and insoluble.

- Soluble fiber helps improve your cholesterol and blood sugar levels. It also promotes good bacteria in the gut and supports the immune system. Oats, dried beans, and fruit, such as apples and oranges, are good sources of soluble fiber.
- Insoluble fiber adds bulk to your stool, moves food waste out of the body more quickly, and can help prevent constipation. Vegetables, wheat bran and other whole grains are good sources of insoluble fiber.

Evidence suggests that diets high in fiber are associated with a reduced risk for cancer, especially colorectal cancer. According to the USDA's Dietary Guidelines 2010, the daily recommendation for fiber is 22-28 grams per day for females and 28-34 grams per day for males.

Speak with your registered dietitian nutritionist or health care provider before drastically increasing your fiber intake. Some colorectal cancer therapies may require a decrease in fiber consumption during or after treatment. Generally, maintaining recommended levels is a part of a healthful diet post-treatment.

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### Rules of thumb when increasing fiber:

Increase fiber slowly to avoid cramping, bloating, and constipation.

Increase fluid intake to prevent constipation.

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## GOOD SOURCES OF FIBER

Food	Serving Size	Total Fiber (G)
Bulgur, cooked	1 cup	8
Lentils, cooked	1/2 cup	8
Kidney beans, cooked	1/2 cup	6
Pear, with skin	1 medium	6
Quinoa, cooked	1 cup	5
Almonds, whole	1/4 cup	5
Apple, with skin	1 medium	4
Figs, dried	5	4
Potato, baked with skin	1 medium	4
Brown rice, cooked	1 cup	4
Strawberries, raw and sliced	1 cup	3
Oatmeal, cooked	3/4 cup	3
Spinach, cooked	1/2 cup	2
Whole wheat bread	1 slice	2

### SIDE EFFECT MANAGEMENT

You may experience side effects related to your treatment. Below are tips that can help minimize symptoms. If they persist or worsen, please consult your health care provider for possible medications that may help.

#### Diarrhea

- Avoid high fiber foods such as raw fruits and vegetables, whole grain breads, and high fiber cereals.



- Avoid coffee, milk and dairy products, alcohol, greasy foods, and sweets.
- Increase fluid intake and consume foods high in sodium and potassium, such as broth, bananas, and potatoes, to replace these minerals.
- Try the B.R.A.T.T. diet: **B**ananas, **R**ice, **A**pplesauce, **T**oast, and **T**ea.

### **Poor Appetite**

- Eat foods high in protein and calories, such as peanut butter, cheese, yogurt, nuts, boiled eggs, pudding, and ice cream.
- Try cold or room temperature foods like cold sandwiches, or tuna, egg, and chicken salads.
- Eat small, frequent meals throughout the day. Don't wait until you are hungry to eat.

### **Constipation**

- Exercise daily if possible – any type of movement is helpful.
- Drink 8-10 cups of fluid daily, including warm, non-caffeinated beverages.
- Increase fiber gradually.

### **Gas/Bloating**

- Eat and drink slowly, avoid using straws to prevent ingesting air.
- Avoid carbonated beverages and chewing gum.
- Limit gas forming foods, such as beans, broccoli, cabbage, or any food you are sensitive to.



### Altered Sense of Taste

- Avoid using metallic utensils; use plastic or wooden ones.
- Brush teeth before and after meals.
- Try foods that you are not familiar with (to decrease the expectation of what it should taste like).

### FOOD SAFETY

Foodborne illness (food poisoning) is caused by harmful bacteria that enter the body through food. Cancer and its treatments destroy the body's ability to make white blood cells that fight infection. This weakens the immune system, increasing risk of foodborne illness.

Here are some tips for patients and caregivers to prevent foodborne illness:

#### Avoid:

- Raw, undercooked foods/animal products that contain meats, eggs, and shellfish.
- Unpasteurized eggs, milk, milk products, and fruit and vegetable juices.
- Soft cheeses such as queso fresco, blue-veined, feta, Brie, and Camembert.
- Moldy or outdated products. Look for sell-by dates, which affect quality of product, and use-by date, which can affect safety of product.
- Unrefrigerated milk or cream-based foods, and desserts and pastries containing custard.



- Street vendors, salad bars, or buffets.
- Leftovers past 2 days.
- Damaged, rusted, dented, or swollen canned foods.
- Foods that were defrosted at room temperature and then refrozen.
- Using the same cutting board, dishes, and kitchen utensils to prepare raw meats and ready-to-eat foods.

### Do:

- Wash your hands for at least 20 seconds in warm running water before and after preparing foods.
- Wash all fruits and vegetables thoroughly, even skins and rinds that are not edible.
- Properly clean and sanitize all kitchen utensils as well as cutting boards and counter tops.
- Refrigerate all perishable foods below 40°F immediately.
- Store eggs in their original carton in the refrigerator, not in the refrigerator door.
- Store leftovers in covered, shallow containers.
- Thaw all food in the refrigerator or in the microwave, not at room temperature or on the counter top.
- Use clean cloths, sponges, or kitchen towels to wipe countertops.
- Use a food thermometer to cook beef to 160°F, poultry to 165°F, pork to 145°F, egg and egg dishes to 160°F, fish to 145°F, and leftovers to 165°F.
- Wash tops of canned items before opening.
- **When in doubt, throw it out.**



# Nutritional Concerns Post-Treatment

## WEIGHT MANAGEMENT

Weight fluctuations are common during the treatment of colorectal cancer. Many people experience unintentional weight loss, caused by poor appetite, fatigue, treatments, and the cancer itself. Weight loss can result in a loss of muscle (strength) and fatigue, which can further challenge your ability to finish treatment. If you have a poor appetite, nausea, and/or are losing weight, speak to your medical provider about possible treatments.

Obesity is associated with increased risk of colorectal cancer. Excess body weight causes changes in normal body metabolism and hormones, which can trigger tumor growth. Obese individuals are also in a state of low-level, chronic inflammation, which is associated with increased cancer risk. For those diagnosed with colon cancer, research has shown that obesity raises the risk of cancer recurrence and mortality, specifically in individuals with high amounts of abdominal fat. Obese individuals with colon cancer can have a reduced sensitivity to anti-cancer medications and have a greater risk of post-surgical complications than their lean counterparts.

For these reasons, it is strongly advised to maintain a healthy weight. Your health care provider and registered dietitian nutritionist will help you determine the healthiest weight for you. If you have experienced unintentional weight gain or loss,



let your health care team know. Here are some tips to achieve a healthy weight:

### **Weight Loss**

- Do not attempt to lose weight until you have fully recovered from your treatment.
- Eat at least five servings of fruits and vegetables a day.
- Avoid sweetened beverages and high-fat, high-sugar desserts, such as cookies, cakes, and ice cream.
- Use smaller plates to help control portion sizes.
- Eat only when you are hungry.

### **Weight Gain**

- Make fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean proteins the foundation of your diet.
- Add extra calories to foods you already eat. Some ideas include: butter, olive oil, nuts, peanut butter, avocado, dry milk powder, ground flax seeds, and cheese.
- Try small, frequent meals during the day if you get full quickly.
- Avoid skipping meals and snack throughout the day on nuts, dried fruits, protein bars, hummus, and crackers.



## EXERCISE

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### Endurance (aerobic) exercise:

walking,  
running,  
dancing,  
swimming,  
and cycling.

### Resistance (strength) exercise:

calisthenics,  
free weights, and  
resistance bands.

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Physical activity has been shown to reduce the risk of colon cancer incidence and recurrence, and to improve quality of life. In addition to its health benefits, physical activity also helps to regulate insulin, balance energy, regulate bowel movements, and reduce inflammation. To alleviate fatigue related to cancer illness and therapies, combining endurance and resistance exercise during active treatment and post-treatment can be helpful. The current recommendation for colorectal cancer survivors is 30 minutes of moderate exercise five times per week, along with stretching and two or three strength training sessions weekly. Walking is an easy way to stay physically active and should be incorporated into your everyday activities such as shopping, running errands, or going to work. Of course, your exercise routine should be personalized to your needs, abilities, and medical condition. Lower intensity exercise may be needed if you are fatigued from treatments. Be sure to consult your doctor before starting any physical activity or exercise program.

## COLOSTOMY/ILEOSTOMY

Here are some post-surgery tips for patients with a colostomy or ileostomy.

- Add new foods gradually (every three days). Keep a food journal to monitor tolerance to foods.
- Eat small frequent meals at regular intervals. Skipping meals increases watery stools and gas formation. Always chew thoroughly.



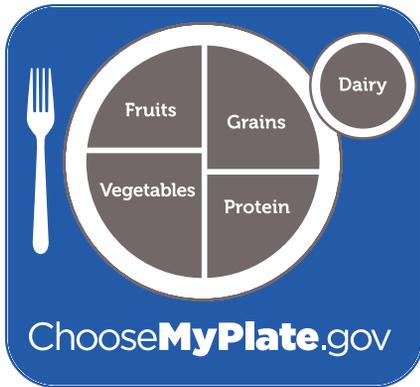
- Choose soft cooked vegetables such as green beans, carrots, beets, squash, and stewed tomatoes.
- Drink six to eight glasses of water each day, but not with meals.
- Choose low-fat snacks such as crackers, applesauce, and hot cereals. Fats tend to be harder to digest and could cause digestive irritation.
- Include high-potassium foods, which are beneficial during bouts of diarrhea. Food sources include beets, potatoes, greens, beans, yogurt, fish, bananas, and avocados.
- Limit sugary desserts and beverages as they aggravate diarrhea.
- Omit dairy from diet if excessive gas or diarrhea occur.
- Limit raw fibrous vegetables (such as raw celery), foods with kernels, nuts, and seeds. Remove skins and seeds from fruits and vegetables.
- Avoid caffeine and alcohol. They are dehydrating and stimulate gastric motility.



# Pulling It All Together

## PLANNING WELL-BALANCED MEALS

Knowing what types of foods you wish to prepare, and having the ingredients on hand, are key to successful meal planning. Bearing in mind any special dietary concerns, the MyPlate model can make this job easier. Note, however, that if you are in treatment and/or experiencing side effects, you may need to select blander, lower fat, and lower fiber food choices.



### **Vegetables and Fruit:** *½ of the plate*

Serve vegetables with every meal as a side dish, mixed dish (such as stew or soup), salad, or garnish for a sandwich. While it is important to select a wide variety of vegetables, green leafy vegetables such as kale, collards, or spinach, should be served regularly. Fruit can be part of the meal, or as a snack or dessert.

### **Protein:** *¼ of the plate*

Look for lean cuts of meat, especially chicken and fish. Try plant sources of protein, including beans and tofu.

### **Grain:** *¼ of the plate*

Best choices are whole grains, such as brown rice, whole-wheat pasta, barley, or quinoa, as well as starchy vegetables, including potatoes and corn.



**Dairy:** 2-3 servings a day

Examples include milk, cheese, and yogurt. Use low-fat products if needed.

### PLANT-BASED DIET

Eating a plant-based diet has many benefits for your health, including a decreased risk of CRC. To positively impact your health, try increasing the quantity of plant foods you eat, while decreasing the amount of animal foods. Plant foods such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains, beans, nuts, and seeds contain the fiber and nutrients (phytochemicals or antioxidants) your body needs to fight disease and inflammation.

Take these steps towards a plant-based diet:

- Try new things. Choose one new fruit or vegetable each week.
- Eat one meatless meal each week.
- Buy a cookbook with meatless recipes.

**Antioxidants** are nutrients found in plant foods that protect body cells from damaging free radicals\*, formed by both normal body processes as well as by exposure to environmental toxins such as cigarette smoke and pollution.

**Phytochemicals** are also found in plant foods and act as antioxidants. They too seek out and neutralize dangerous substances that can damage the body. In addition, they discourage the growth of cancer cells.

**\*Free radicals:** unstable particles produced in the body through normal processes but also formed by outside sources such as cigarette smoke and pollutants.



## COOKING METHODS AND CANCER RISK

If you are undergoing cancer treatment, are in remission, or are simply interested in cancer prevention, it is important to be aware of the effect certain cooking methods have on your food. When meats are pan-fried or grilled over an open flame at very high temperatures (greater than 350° F), certain chemicals are formed: heterocyclic amines (HCAs) and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs). These known carcinogens may increase your risk of cancer. HCAs develop when the protein and other substances found in meat react at high temperatures. The longer the meat is cooked, the hotter it becomes, and the more HCAs are formed, especially in blackened areas of meat. PAHs are formed when fat from the meat drips into the flames of the grill. The PAHs adhere to the meat when the flames touch the meat's surface. This explains why PAHs are typically found in charred and smoked meats.

Certain grilling and preparation techniques can reduce the amount of carcinogens created, such as:

- Choosing lean cuts of meat and trimming the fat to avoid PAHs.
- Grilling at lower temperatures.
- Using aluminum foil to create a barrier between meat and flames.
- Precooking (roasting or baking) meat before grilling to cook off fat.
- Trimming off any charred or burned parts of food.



- Marinating meats to reduce HCAs, increase flavor, and tenderize. Try the marinade(s) below!
- Using a meat thermometer to cook meat to the correct temperature and not overcooking. Refer to the food safety section on page 12.
- Avoiding recipes for “blackened” foods.

### CITRUS MARINADE

(Yield: 1.5 cups or 4 servings)

- 1 cup orange juice
- 1/4 cup lemon juice
- 1/4 cup lime juice
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 tsp. ground coriander
- 1 tsp. lemon-pepper seasoning

Mix all ingredients together in large, wide and shallow non-metal casserole dish or mixing bowl. Add food to be grilled and turn to coat all sides. Cover and refrigerate for 1-6 hours. When ready to grill, remove meat and discard marinade.

**Per serving:** 19 calories, 0 g total fat (0 g saturated fat), 5 g carbohydrates, 0 g protein, 0 g dietary fiber, 0 mg sodium.

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## HERBED DIJON MARINADE AND BASTING SAUCE

(Yield: Makes about 1 cup or 8 servings)

- 3 Tbsp. olive oil
- 2 Tbsp. balsamic vinegar
- 1/4 cup finely chopped shallots
- 3 garlic cloves, finely minced
- 3 Tbsp. Dijon mustard
- 2 Tbsp. freshly squeezed lemon juice
- 1 Tbsp. grated lemon peel
- 1 Tbsp. finely minced fresh thyme, or 1/2 tsp. crushed dried thyme
- 3/4 tsp. crushed dried tarragon

In medium bowl, combine all ingredients. Pour half into plastic container with lid to reserve for basting while grilling. Place other half of mixture into large non-metal casserole dish or mixing bowl. Add food to be grilled and turn to coat all sides. Cover and refrigerate at least 1 hour. When ready to grill, drain well and discard marinade.

**Per serving:** 28 calories, 3 g total fat (0 g saturated fat), 1 g carbohydrates, 0 g protein, 0 g dietary fiber, 36 mg sodium.

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# Sample Menu



(Substitutions for people in treatment in *italics*.)

## BREAKFAST:

- Oatmeal with blueberries and chopped walnuts (*remove nuts and add canned fruits*)
- Whole wheat toast with peanut butter and banana slices (*switch to white toast*)

## LUNCH:

- Vegetable soup with cheese sandwich on whole wheat bread (*switch soup to tomato or chicken noodle, change bread to white*)
- Whole wheat pasta salad with beans and carrots (*substitute refined pasta with cooked carrots and tuna*)

## DINNER:

- Baked salmon with sweet potato and broccoli (*change broccoli to cooked string beans*)
- Chicken breast with brown rice and roasted beets (*substitute white rice for brown*)

## SNACKS:

- Fruits, unsalted nuts, pretzels, cheese sticks, cottage cheese, whole wheat crackers and avocado on toast.

## LOWER FAT/FIBER SNACKS:

- Pretzels, low-fat yogurt, canned fruits, hummus and crackers.



# Resources

**American Cancer Society**  
[cancer.org](http://cancer.org)

**American Institute for Cancer Research**  
[aicr.org](http://aicr.org)

**Cancer Care**  
[cancercares.org](http://cancercares.org)

**Cancer Research and Prevention Foundation**  
[preventcancer.org/colorectal](http://preventcancer.org/colorectal)

**Colon Cancer Alliance**  
[ccalliance.org](http://ccalliance.org)

**Cook For Your Life**  
[cfyl.org](http://cfyl.org)

**God's Love We Deliver**  
[glwd.org](http://glwd.org)

**National Cancer Institute**  
[cancer.gov](http://cancer.gov)

**United Ostomy Association, Inc.**  
[uoa.org](http://uoa.org)

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### *Disclaimer*

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