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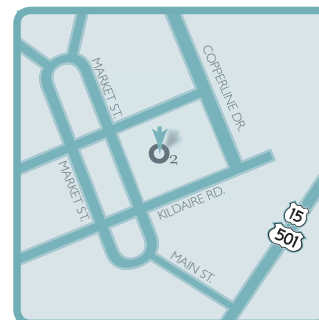
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BETTER EATING, BETTER HEALTH



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Better eating, better health

Exploring the connection between cancer and diet

BY MARGOT C. LESTER
Contributing Writer

The headlines are hardly helpful these days:

"Papaya is Tasty Way to Fight Cancer and Poor Digestion"

"Eggs, bad? Multi-grain bread, good?"

"Fava Beans: Great for Hormone Replacement With Anti-Cancer Potential"

Every time you turn a page, it seems there's another study touting or decrying a relationship between certain foods and cancer – and sometimes they contradict each other. What's a cancer-conscious eater to do?

The short answer is: Cozy up to some produce.

"It's estimated that at least one third of all cancers in the U.S. could be prevented by making changes in diet and lifestyle," says Aimee Shea, outpatient oncology dietitian at the N.C. Cancer Hospital on the UNC campus. "From a nutrition standpoint, really the most important thing people can do is eat more plant food like fruits, veggies, whole grains, beans, nuts and seeds."



Marci Kramish Campbell
PHOTO BY AVA BARLOW

Shea suggests shooting for at least five servings per day – minimum – of fruits and vegetables.

"Make sure you have a fruit and/or veggie at every meal and try to use them as snacks as well," she counsels.

A weighty matter

Plant foods are preferred in part because they're relatively low in calories, which can help achieve and maintain a healthy weight. Managing your waistline may help reduce the risk of cancer and other chronic diseases. In fact, Marci Kramish Campbell, a professor in the department of nutrition at the UNC School of Public Health, suggests one dietary way to lower your odds of getting cancer is to cut calories by 100 to 200 per day to avoid weight gain.

"The strongest evidence is that obesity is a risk factor for a number of cancers, like colon cancer," Campbell explains. "And weight gain in women, which is common after menopause, is a risk factor for breast cancer."

Plant foods also are jam packed with vitamins, minerals and fiber – all of which are believed (though not yet proven) to regulate cell cycles, keep cancer cells from turning into tumors and help the body defend itself against cancer cells and other intruders.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4

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“When we try to isolate specific vitamins or compounds in foods and see if those are protective, the studies mostly do not show a protective effect,” Campbell says. “For example, epidemiological studies indicate that people who eat lots of fruits and vegetables have a lower risk of certain cancers; but then if you do a study supplementing with beta-carotene, you don’t see a change in risk. In fact, some supplement studies show an increased cancer risk. In general then, eating less calorically dense foods, lots of fruits and vegetables, less red meat and more low-fat dairy is probably a healthy pattern for general cancer and chronic-disease prevention.”

Let’s get fresh

All this means you need to spend more time hanging out in the produce department or at your local farmers’ market. And while most fruits and vegetables are available year round these days, eating with the seasons (noshing on what’s currently growing locally) often gives your body just what it’s craving during each period of the year.

“It’s a great idea to eat with the season,” Shea says. “It’s better for the environment and probably cheaper.”

Here are some in-season foods that may help reduce cancer risk. You can find most of them at your local farmers’ market:

Leafy greens: spinach, collards, arugula

Fresh berries: strawberries; blackberries are on the way

Crucifers: broccoli, cauliflower, pac choi

Beans: sugar snaps, fava

If you want to slap some protein on the grill, pick up some white meat; or if you’re really hankering for beef, seek out the leanest cuts available.



Aimee Shea PHOTO BY AVA BARLOW

Conventional or organic?

While it’s clear that plant foods are preferable, the jury’s still out on whether you should only buy organic.

“Organically grown foods are better for the planet, but we don’t have any evidence that they are cancer

preventing,” Campbell asserts. “It makes sense to avoid a lot of pesticides, but organic foods can also be very expensive.”

If money’s no object, looking for the organic label is never a bad idea, Shea notes.

“However, since most people can’t afford this 100 percent of the time, I emphasize that it is more beneficial to eat the fruits and veggies – whether conventional or organic – than to skip them and choose a cupcake instead,” she continues.

“And just because something doesn’t have an organic label, doesn’t mean it’s bad for you. Oftentimes, small, local farmers are unable to afford an organic label, but they basically practice organic farming methods. This is one more reason to check out the farmers’ markets, where you can get to know the farmers and find out how food is prepared.”

Lowering cancer risk

The three major recommendations for cancer prevention are:

1. Aim to maintain a healthy weight throughout life.
2. Choose mostly plant foods, limit red meat and avoid processed meats when possible.
3. Be physically active every day – in any way – for 30 minutes or more

SOURCE: American Institute for Cancer Research

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Crops, healthy families flourish in community garden

BY CAROLYN FOY EVANS
Contributing Writer

CARRBORO—Jana Sartor's 3-year-old son, Ezra, loves watching his garden grow. His family is one of many working together in the James Street Community Garden, the latest of three sites developed under the Growing Healthy Kids Project.

A collaborative effort by the Orange County Partnership for Young Children (OCPYC), the Orange County agriculture extension office and the Town of Carrboro, the initiative is funded by a grant from the N.C. Health and Wellness Trust Fund.

The project focuses on reducing childhood obesity in Orange County. In 2006, more than 35 percent of the county's children aged 2 to 4 were overweight or obese, according to the North Carolina Department of Health.

The space, on the street's west side, was donated by Duke Energy. The company also organized a group of its retirees to help build a shed for the garden. This allowed OCPYC to create an easily accessible garden in a prime location at an affordable price.

Teaching good habits

Completely organic, the community garden provides the basis for educating families on all aspects of developing a healthy diet, from growing the food to preparing meals within a tight budget.

"Produce, especially when it is organically grown, is simply too expensive for many families," says Margaret Samuels, executive director of the OCPYC. "Here they have the resources of the county extension experts to help them grow their own organic produce."

Samuels sees tremendous value in teaching healthy eating habits to children through gardening.

"Children are likely to eat something that they have grown," she says. "Plus, a key part of healthy living is being outdoors and active, which is definitely part of tending a garden."

Even the smallest hands get involved in digging, watering and planting the garden. "We planted my pepper.... It's really hot," Ezra says, giggling with enthusiasm. "Then we picked it, and we're going to eat it!"



PHOTO COURTESY OF ORANGE COUNTY PARTNERSHIP FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6

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Growing together

Participants in the James Street garden include 20 families selected by the OCPYC and members of the Carrboro United Methodist Church and the Episcopal Church of the Advocate. Each family is allotted an 8-by-10-foot plot that they tend during garden workdays every weekend. The plots may sound small, but with careful planting the space can produce more than the family needs.

And the extras go to good use. Later this summer, participating families will share in a potluck dinner prepared with overruns from their gardens.

"The families love working together," Samuels says.

Harvesting more

According to Samuels, the Project's earlier gardens — at Martin Luther King Park and Carrboro Elementary School — are already showing positive results.

"Families participating in those gardens report increased consumption of fresh vegetables and fruits, as well as healthier overall lifestyles," she says.

Participation in the program is restricted to families who are residents of Carrboro and have at least one child under 6. Low-income families are given



PHOTO COURTESY OF ORANGE COUNTY PARTNERSHIP FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

priority.

Though all the family spaces have been allotted, Maria Hitt, coordinator of the Growing Healthy Kids Program, offers this advice for growing your own organic garden, even if all you have are a few containers on the back deck:

PICK THE RIGHT SPOT: A healthy gar-



At the opening ceremony for the new James Street garden

PHOTO BY LUCY BUTCHER

den needs five to six hours of sun daily.

START SMALL: Use smaller-scale plants; experts at the local garden center, extension office and farmers' markets can help you make the right choices.

DON'T OVERCROWD PLANTS: Overcrowding leads to stressed plants,

making them targets for pests. Most plants come with suggested spacing, or you can consult an expert.

KEEP IT GREEN: Stay away from herbicides, pesticides and chemical fertilizers. When in doubt, ask a local authority or check organic gardening websites for advice.



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Eat Smart, Move More Health Tip

What are you doing this summer?

Here are 4 ways to spend your summer days:



1 Choose to Move More

2 Tame the Tube & Get Moving

3 Prepare More Meals at Home

4 Re-think Your Drink

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Message brought to you by
Healthy Carolinians of Orange County

Moving more every day

BY SUZANNE VALDIVIA
Contributing Writer

Finding ways to incorporate exercise isn't as easy as it used to be. And joining a gym or paying fees for kids to join a league isn't always in the budget. But with summer coming, those extra hours of daylight at the coolest part of the day are a great time to get out and go.

McDougle Elementary physical education teacher Janis Basnight suggests that "families can run through the sprinkler, play kickball and softball, bike, swim, play with the dog, walk somewhere you usually drive to, hike our town trails.... Many families are planting gardens due to the economy. Gardening is a great physical activity."

North Carolina is ranked fifth-highest in the country for childhood obesity and 65 percent of adults in our state are either overweight or obese. The data is out there and we know that by staying fit we put our bodies at less risk for all kinds of health problems that could really slow us down.

But what if the daily schedule seems so jam-packed that scheduling a block of

time for exercise isn't possible? Squeezing in short spurts of physical activity, 10 minutes, three times a day, will go a long way to keeping you fit, reducing stress and increasing your energy level. If time is tight, combine exercise with other activities: bike to the nearest farmers' market (ncfarmfresh.com/Directory.asp) or grocery store. When you walk out to get the mail, keep walking — you can read and sort the mail as you log one full block in your neighborhood.

If your neighborhood streets lack sidewalks or don't seem exercise-friendly, pack a bag of sports equipment and take the family to a local park. Bring a family picnic and finish the evening with a short hike around a pond or park trail. Take the whole family to the local school track and each person can use their favorite method of getting around.

Last weekend, while jogging slowly around our local high school track, I was passed by a pair of 6-year-old bikers; one rollerblading mom; three walkers in animated conversation; a friendly, scooter-riding 9-year-old; and several much faster runners. Total cost



for that workout: \$0. Follow that up with a popsicle made from real juice (60 calories) and you've got a great low-budget summer outing.

A website sponsored by Healthy Carolinians of Orange County has lots of suggestions for ways to make exercise an easy addition to your day, along with recipes for healthy snacks and alternatives to soda. Visit co.orange.nc.us/health/esmmoc.asp for more information.

Making small changes in your usual routine can open up two or three little

windows for exercise a day. Sometimes it just takes being creative. Just last week, with only a half hour to squeeze in a little exercise and pick up an onion I needed for dinner, I decided to jog to the neighborhood market and back. I felt a little funny padding down the sidewalk — onion in one hand, loose change in the other. But then I got to thinking — maybe I can get this whole "onion relay" thing to catch on.

Suzanne Valdivia is a volunteer with Orange County's Healthy Carolinians program.

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