

## **To Supplement or Not by the American Institute for Cancer Research**

Surveys show that Americans use supplements to improve their health. An estimated six of every 10 Americans take a supplement on a regular basis, while 85 percent use vitamin, mineral, herbal or other specialty supplements sometime during the year. People think supplements help them feel better, prevent illness, speed up recovery, live longer and build muscle. Scientific findings however, show that supplements cannot take the place of whole foods. Cancer is a case in point.

### **Whole Foods More Healthsome**

Several research studies have looked at the link between taking dietary supplements and cancer risk. Most research has focused on antioxidant supplements such as vitamins A,C and E and the mineral selenium. These studies have not shown a conclusive link to lower cancer risk. **In populations with an abundant food supply, supplementing the diet actually showed an increase in cancer rates in some cases.** Some positive results have been seen, but mainly in under-fed populations.

Unlike supplements, whole foods contain much more than the few vitamins and minerals we know about. Scientists believe that hundreds of compounds are likely to be working together. For example, besides vitamin C, an orange contains folic acid, dietary fiber, calcium and phytochemicals like carotenoids and limonene, all of which have shown cancer-preventive effects in studies. Oranges also possess potassium, magnesium, phosphorous and other components yet undiscovered. The anti-cancer and other health benefits we receive from whole foods are much greater than those in a pill, powder or potion.

### **Survivors Should Be Cautious**

Surveys show that people whose lives have been touched by cancer eagerly experiment with a wide array of dietary supplements or regimes to prevent a return of cancer, although the effectiveness and safety of these measures are yet unproven. Often, they do so without informing their doctors.

To help survivors make better informed decisions about what supplements to take or what foods to eat, the American Institute for Cancer Research, (AICR) has published *Dietary Options for Cancer Survivors*. This reference guide contains peer-reviewed research findings about the many options available. The options include more than 45 foods, phytochemicals, vitamins, minerals, herbals and dietary regimens. The text is written in an easy-to-understand style. Ideally, survivors should use the book together with their physician.

### **Simple Supplement Advice**

If you consistently follow a mostly plant-based diet with a variety of vegetables, fruits, whole grains and beans – full of vitamins, minerals and other health-protective substances – dietary supplements are probably unnecessary for reducing cancer risk. To be on the safe side, many health experts recommend that some individuals, like people

over 50, pregnant women and strict vegetarians, take a 100% Daily Value (DV) multivitamin supplement. If you think you need a supplement, speak to your doctor. Single nutrient supplementation can be counterproductive or even toxic and should be avoided.

To order a copy of Dietary Options for Cancer Survivors, call the American Institute for Cancer Research at 800-843-8114, ext. 10. The price is \$12 plus \$3.95 shipping and handling.

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