Have You Had Your Fiber Yet? Food Habits and the Risk of Colorectal Cancer

Health experts estimate that 50% of colorectal cancer cases can be prevented with diet and lifestyle changes. A new study offers more insight.

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We learn time and again that prevention is the best medicine, and this holds true for colorectal cancer (CRC). It is estimated that 50% of CRC cases can be prevented with diet and lifestyle modifications. Previous studies that looked at the relationship between CRC development and nutrition concluded that there is a strong correlation between diet and the development of certain types of cancer, specifically CRC.

A recent study published in Preventive Medicine Reports investigated the impact that an insufficient diet plays in the development and prevalence of certain cancers as well as the effect that race and ethnicity has on diet. Wholegrains, dietary fiber, non-starchy fruits, and vegetables, dairy products, milk, cheese, dietary calcium, coffee, and calcium supplements were found to be associated with preventing cancer development. The study examined population attributable factors and the number of excessive cases diagnosed in Texas in 2015 that were attributed to an inadequate diet, defined as a diet that does not meet or conform to the national or global dietary recommendations.

With a diverse study population, the researchers had the opportunity to explore how race and ethnicity play into diet and thus contribute to the prevalence of cancers, specifically colorectal cancer (CRC).

The study found::

- While men were more likely than women to not follow guidelines on red and processed meat consumption.

- Women were more likely to miss dietary recommendations on fiber and calcium intake.

- A significant correlation between processed meats consumption and the prevalence of CRC and a connection between red meat consumption and the prevalence of CRC.

There has been additional research conducted to show that there is a link between dietary fiber intake, and dietary calcium intake and the prevention of CRC. Looking at the racial and ethnic difference the study found that Non-Hispanic Whites consumed higher than the recommended dietary intake of red and processed meats. While it was found that Non-Hispanic Blacks were the most likely to have insufficient fiber and calcium intake.

In the Texas population, the authors found::

- 3.3% of all new cancers (>3,428) could be attributed to an inadequate diet
- 34% of new CRC cases can be attributed to dietary insufficiencies

The authors describe a similar correlation identified in an Australian population, where::

- 17.6% of CRCs were related to an insufficient fiber level in diet
- 17.7% of CRCs were attributed to red and processed meats
- Men had a higher proportion of cancers attributable to an insufficient diet than women
- Excess consumption of processed meat contributed to 1,002 new cancer cases and red meat consumption contributed to 379 additional cancer cases

This study along with multiple other studies conducted in relation to dietary factors and their contribution to cancer highlight the importance of diet—especially insufficient fiber intake and excess red or processed meat intake—on overall cancer burden.

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