

Soyburger, Anyone?

Q.

What kinds of nutritional supplements or foods will help prevent prostate cancer?

—J.G., West Lafayette, Ind.

A.

One of the most important nutrients in preventing prostate cancer is lycopene. Lycopene is known as a “phytonutrient” and is the ingredient that gives tomatoes, pink grapefruits, watermelons and papayas their red color.

Tomatoes, however, are the richest source of lycopene, and cooked tomato products, such as tomato paste, spaghetti sauce and pizza sauce, provide much higher amounts of the phytonutrient compared with fresh tomatoes or tomato juice.

Spaghetti sauce also contains olive oil, an added benefit that makes this particular food product an extremely good choice as a source of lycopene. That’s because the oil assists in the body’s absorption of the nutrient.

Many studies have shown a correlation between a high consumption of tomato products and a decreased incidence of prostate cancer. A diet rich in lycopene derived from tomato-based products can reduce the risk of prostate cancer by

approximately 40 percent.

One study, the Health Professionals Follow-up Study, which tested 40,000 subjects, found that a man who would eat 10 servings or more of tomato-based foods per week could decrease his risk of prostate cancer by as much as 45 percent.

As an alternative to a diet like this, take a capsule of lycopene, 10 mg to 15 mg (milligrams), twice a day. This may be purchased at most health-food stores.

“Cruciferous” vegetables such as cabbage, broccoli, brussels sprouts and cauliflower also contain potent phytonutrients, including “indole-3-carbinol,” otherwise known as I3C, which interferes with the ability of cancer cells to grow. Because of their phytonutrient content, these cruciferous vegetables significantly reduce the risk of developing prostate cancer.

A recent study in the Journal of the National Cancer Institute stated that three or more servings of cruciferous vegetables per week can reduce the risk of prostate cancer by almost 50 percent. If you do not like the taste of these types of vegetables, you may want to buy I3C at the health-food store. Take a dose of approximately 200 mg three times a day.

Soy foods help prevent prostate cancer. In fact, Japanese men—who have a diet high in soy and low in fat—have a much lower risk of developing prostate cancer.

Q.

I have a family history of prostate cancer. What steps can I take now to protect myself? □ □—F.H., Doraville, Ga.

A.

The most important risk factor for developing prostate cancer is a diet high in animal fat. That's because environmental chemicals tend to accumulate in the fat of the meat.

Because you have a family history of this cancer, you should decrease dramatically your intake of animal fats, especially red meat, whole milk, cheese, eggs, butter, fried foods, and cured meats such as ham, bacon, corned beef and so on.

Soy products help prevent prostate cancer, and you should add more of these to your diet. Soy foods include soy milk, soy protein, tofu, tempeh, miso soup, soy burgers and other soy meats.

Or, you may take a soy supplement that contains isoflavones, such as genistein. Studies recommend that the optimal daily dose of isoflavones is about 100 mg a day, taken in divided dosages.

In addition, there is a higher incidence of prostate cancer in men who work with heavy metals such as cadmium and mercury. Workers in chemical plants, such as petroleum plants, have a higher risk for prostate cancer as well.

I advise my patients who work with chemicals to wear gloves. I'll counsel a painter, for example, not to wash his hands with paint thinner after a job. Also, do not let gasoline or other petrol chemicals come in contact with your skin because these chemicals are easily absorbed into the body.

Finally, eat plenty
of tomatoes, cooked tomato products and cruciferous
vegetables.