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HOW NUTRITION CAN ACCELERATE HEALING

BY LINDA KNITTEL

CHEF DAVID WELLS HAS COOKED UNDER PRESSURE. In addition to a stint at George Lucas' Skywalker Ranch preparing meals for such celebrities as Steven Spielberg, he has worked as personal chef to Apple Computer's Steven Jobs. But it wasn't until his mother, Ricki, was diagnosed with late-stage ovarian cancer that Wells' culinary skills were truly put to the test. This time, in addition to pleasing the palate, he needed to use food as a means of healing. Going on both his intuition and scientific knowledge, Wells believed that if he could provide his mother with the nourishment she needed to withstand chemotherapy and then rebuild her body, she could beat the odds. Since his mother is still cancer-free after 11 years, it seems this chef was onto something.

The very day that Wells' mother had her tumor removed and was given less than two years to live, he started cooking for her. "As soon as she got out of the operating room, I went back to the house to prepare food, because what they were feeding her was not conducive to healing. Broth out of a can and Jello have almost no nutrition," says Wells, who—after clearing it with the hospital staff—began bringing his mother steamed greens, butternut squash, unpasteurized raw miso and ginger tea.

"She needed to boost her immune system," he says, which is also why she decided to postpone her first chemotherapy treatment and go home for three weeks. "It gave her a chance to clear her head and get together emotionally and nutritionally," explains Wells.

Providing your body with sound nutrition before and during chemotherapy or radiation can have a drastic impact on your outcome. "It is a fact that between 37 and 50% of all cancer patients die as a result of the malnutrition induced by the cancer and/or chemotherapy," says Michael Murray, N.D., co-author of *How to*

FOOD
REALLY IS
YOUR BEST
MEDICINE.

Vietnamese Spring Rolls
with Peanut Sauce,
recipe on Page 50



PHOTOS BY CORY SORENSEN

Prevent and Treat Cancer with Natural Medicine (Riverhead Books, 2002). “Just supporting someone nutritionally as they go through treatment will lead to significant improvements in quality and length of life.”

In addition to researching the healing properties of foods, Wells spent hours in medical libraries reading about the specific physiological effects of chemotherapy agents, exploring modalities from qi gong (ancient exercises developed in China) to visualization techniques, and frequenting ovarian cancer support groups to learn from other women’s experiences. From there, he and his mother developed a game plan for her healing that included a nutritional approach to address what they saw as the four stages of treatment. “Even now, I spend a lot of my time going to these support groups giving nutritional help and advice that will empower people with cancer,” he says.

NUTRITION FOR THE FOUR STAGES OF TREATMENT

Wells and his mother are firm believers in understanding and embracing what chemotherapy actually does in the body. “In stage one, when you are getting an infusion, you

Foods That Ease Side Effects

HEALTHY FOOD CHOICES CAN HAVE A DRAMATIC impact on your ability to withstand cancer treatment and overcome the disease. However, allowing someone undergoing chemotherapy to choose foods that feel comforting is even more important. Below is a list of foods that may help ease the side effects of cancer treatment. Be sure to check with your health care provider before embarking on any nutritional regimen.

IN ORDER TO ...

Ease nausea

Rebuild GI tract

Rebuild iron stores

Boost immune system

Rebuild protein stores

“Tonify” or detoxify body

FOODS THAT MAY HELP

Ginger, chamomile and peppermint teas; broths; cool liquids; dry toast

Yogurt, cottage cheese, unpasteurized miso, whey protein

Leafy greens, molasses, prunes
Organic fruits and vegetables, and their juices

Wild cold-water fish, organic chicken and lamb, whey protein, spirulina

Ginger tea, garlic, cayenne, aloe juice, and green foods such as wheat grass and spirulina

Bowl of Sunshine: Ginger-Butternut-Orange Soup

NUTRITIONAL BENEFITS This soup is high in fiber and powerful antioxidants (especially vitamins A and C), and is a low-calorie source of potassium and folate. It’s excellent for improving circulation, and relieving nausea and indigestion.

Makes approximately 10 12-oz servings

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1 large onion, sliced
- 2 to 4 cloves garlic, thinly sliced
- ¼ cup fresh ginger, peeled and sliced
- 1 cup rice vinegar or sake
- 1 large butternut squash (peeled, seeded and cut into chunks)
- 3 quarts purified water
- ½ bunch cilantro, chopped
- 3 tablespoons orange zest (use orange—not white—part of skin)
- ½ bunch scallions, thinly sliced on bias (angle)
- Salt and pepper to taste

In a large soup pot over medium heat, sauté onions, garlic and ginger in olive oil for two to three minutes until translucent. Add vinegar or sake, and simmer for two to three minutes. Add butternut squash and 2 quarts of purified water. Simmer slowly for two hours. Ladle contents into a blender, and carefully purée. If needed, adjust consistency with remaining quart of water. Return puréed mixture to rinsed pot, heat and simmer. Add cilantro, orange zest and scallions. Season with salt and pepper, and serve. *Caution: Always be careful when puréeing hot food, as contents may erupt.*

just have to relax and let the chemicals do their job,” says Wells. When the side effects of that chemo kick in, you have hit stage two. At this point, it is important to find anything to eat that seems comforting. “You certainly don’t have to eat steamed greens, but since the enzymes and good flora in your digestive tract are now dead, your stomach needs to have something in it,”



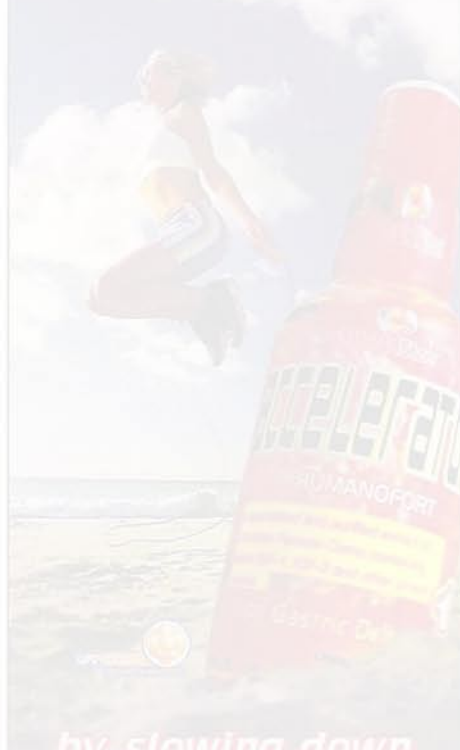
Broths, cool liquids and soups every couple of hours help to control chemotherapy's infamous side effects of nausea and vomiting.

says Wells. Broths, cool liquids and soups, such as Bowl of Sunshine (see Wells' recipe on Page 48), every couple of hours keep the stomach's acid from acting directly on the walls of the stomach, and increasing chemotherapy's infamous side effects of nausea and vomiting. Ginger and chamomile teas can also help. "Even though you may not be hungry, eat a little something to keep your stomach working," advises Wells. "My mom craved mashed potatoes, so that is what we gave her."

Once the side effects begin to subside and you're slowly getting your energy back, you are in stage three. Although you may feel stronger, accepting help and nurturing at this time is necessary for healing. "Care giving is really important. Find someone to be there for you, and let them nurture you," suggests Wells.

Stage three is also the time when it is critical to ingest a lot of nutrient-dense foods and lots of lean protein from easy-to-digest sources, such as wild cold-water fish rather than red meat. "Smoothies made with whey protein also can help provide the daily ideal of 1 gram of protein per pound of body weight," says Murray. "The glutamine in whey protein improves the tolerance to chemo agents by helping to regenerate the cells that line your intestinal tract."

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Vietnamese Spring Rolls with Peanut Sauce *(pictured on Page 47)*

NUTRITIONAL BENEFITS The wide variety of fresh vegetables are a substantial source of digestive enzymes and contain essential vitamins, particularly vitamins A, B and C. They are also rich in minerals; full of cleansing and "tonifying" properties essential for healthy nerve and digestive function; and high in fiber, complex carbohydrates and glutamic acid, which may boost immune function.

Makes 8 rolls

- 8 medium spring roll wrappers (rice)
- 1 leek
- 8 shiitake mushrooms
- 2 medium carrots
- 12 snow peas
- 1 each, red and yellow bell peppers
- 1 daikon radish (about 4" long)
- ½ English cucumber
- ½ head cabbage
- 1 bunch scallions
- ½ bunch cilantro
- ½ bunch mint
- ½ bunch basil
- Sesame seeds

Julienne all vegetables, and chop scallions and herbs. Blanch leek, and sauté or poach mushrooms. Moisten rice paper rolls between paper towels or with spray bottle, and let sit for five minutes. Uniformly place vegetables in the center of each roll. Top with scallions, herbs and sesame seeds. Gently roll the rice paper; seal the ends with a small amount of water, if needed. Cut in half, on a bias, and cover with a damp paper towel until ready to eat.

Note: The amount and proportion of ingredients will vary according to personal preference and desired quantity.

Peanut Dipping Sauce

Makes 1½ cups

- 1 tablespoon sesame oil (light)
- 2 tablespoons ginger root (chopped)
- 1 tablespoon garlic (chopped)
- 1 tablespoon lemon grass (chopped)
- 2 tablespoons scallions (chopped)
- 1 cup organic peanut butter
- 1 tablespoon sesame seeds (toasted)
- ½ bunch cilantro (chopped)
- 2 tablespoons rice vinegar
- 2 tablespoons agave nectar
- Water to adjust consistency

Sauté ginger, garlic, lemon grass and scallions in sesame oil. Put all the ingredients into a food processor and pulse. Add water to adjust consistency.

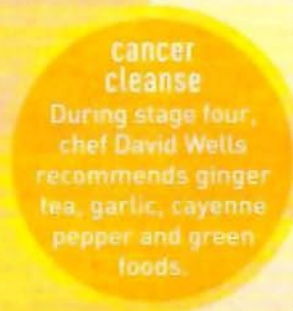
But don't confuse a healthy smoothie with a sugar-filled milkshake. "There is a misconception that drinking lots of ginger ale and milkshakes during chemo is a good idea," observes Rachel Beller, M.S., R.D., director of the Nutritional Oncology Research Center, Brander Nutritional Oncology Counseling Program, John Wayne Cancer Institute. "Cancer cells like sugar, so it is a much better idea to soothe the stomach with unsweetened ginger tea or boost protein intake with a few nuts."

Other healing foods for stages three and four include organic unpasteurized miso, yogurt and cottage cheese, which provide probiotics; leafy greens and molasses, which supply iron; and lots of antioxidant-rich organic fruits and vegetables. "One of the best things you can do is get a juicer and drink 16 to 24 ounces of fresh vegetable juice per day," says Murray.

According to Wells, stage four is when you want to start "tonifying" the body. "You have all of these dead cells that you need to flush out," he explains. In addition to such cleansing rituals as taking walks or doing yoga, he recommends loading up on the nutrients that cleanse the body. "Drink lots of ginger tea, cook with garlic and cayenne pepper, and drink wheat-grass juice," he says.

Using this four-stage approach, Wells' mother successfully fought six rounds of some of the most aggressive and toxic chemotherapy. "My mom is now 11 years cancer-free, and she is probably in as good a shape as she has ever been health-wise," says Wells. And while there are no guarantees, Wells has shown that using nutrition as part of your cancer-fighting arsenal can drastically increase your odds.

"I tell people not to underestimate the tremendous healing power of nature," says Murray. "That constitutes everything we think is natural—faith, attitude, emotions, love, as well as food." ■
Linda Knittel is a health and fitness writer based in Portland, Ore.



selectedreference Meyer K, Schwartz J, Crater D et al "Zingiber officinale (ginger) used to prevent 8-Mop associated nausea" *Dermatologic Nursing* [1995] 7: 242-244