Hello. My name is Beth Szuck and I work as a clinical dietitian at the Breast Health Centre at 400 Taché Avenue.
I will be talking about the services and support we offer at the Breast Health Centre related to your nutritional and dietary needs, what a healthy diet is and why it is important after a diagnosis of breast cancer. I’ll provide you with the latest information on soy foods and flaxseed, taking supplements, weight gain and a variety of other information that will help you through your journey after surgery.
Eating well helps:

- Recover from surgery
- Keep immune system strong
- Lessen the side effects of treatment
- Prevents unwanted weight changes
- Improves energy level
- Feel better and stay strong

One of the first things people ask me following a diagnosis of breast cancer, is what should I eat or are there foods I should avoid.

Eating well helps you recover from surgery, it keeps your immune system strong, it lessens the side effects of treatment, it prevents unwanted weight changes, improves your energy level and helps you feel better and stay strong. It is more important than ever that you try to eat as healthy as you can. However, there may be days this is not possible due to the side effects of chemotherapy. On those days, eat anything that you can and please contact a dietitian if you are concerned. If you are having difficulty eating because of these side effects, supplemental drinks such as Ensure or Boost are an easy way to improve your diet until you are able to eat better.
Let’s review what does a healthy diet include

• Variety of foods
• Whole grains
• Lots of fruits and vegetables – including at least 1 dark green and 1 orange vegetable every day
What does a healthy diet include?

(cont’d)

• Two servings of fish per week
• Including meat alternatives more often
• Foods with little or no added sugar, sodium and fat – also include healthy fat

• 2 servings of fish per week
• Including meat alternatives more often e.g. eggs, nuts, beans, lentils, or dried peas
• Having foods with little or no added sugar, sodium and fat. Be sure to include small amounts of unsaturated fats each day. There is further information on Canada’s Food Guide about choosing healthy fat.
A healthy way of eating includes eating at least every 3-4 hours to help fuel the body. Healthy snacks can be eaten between the meals as needed. A healthy meal would include a food from at least 3 food groups.

This diagram will help you see what a balanced meal could look like. The plate shows the proportion of vegetables, starch and protein foods. Milk or an alternative like yogurt or cheese and fruit in some form are also part of a healthy meal. If that seems too much to eat at one time, some of the foods could be eaten as part of a healthy snack afterwards.
Canada’s Food Guide pulls all of this information together for you and is a recipe to healthy eating. This way of eating helps keep your body healthy since it is designed to reduce the risk of developing chronic diseases. In general, people are doing a great job of choosing healthy foods, but they need to eat more of them.

Start by comparing what you eat with what is recommended on the ‘Guide’ to see how close you are to getting the minimum number of servings listed for your age and gender. By having these minimum number of servings you will be meeting your nutrient requirements as determined by Health Canada with the exception of vitamin D which can be taken as a supplement.

Think of each bite you take as contributing to a healthier, stronger you.
Cancer treatments can kill healthy cells along with cancer cells. This is why many people may have side effects that make it hard to eat well especially while receiving chemotherapy. Pain medications and the cancer itself can also cause these side effects. Side effects can vary from treatment to treatment and from person to person. The good news is that the eating-related side effects should fade away after treatment ends.

For information on managing side effects from your chemotherapy treatment:

• Speak with your oncology team or contact the dietitian at the WRHA Breast Health Centre
• Check out the nutrition information on the CancerCare Manitoba’s website:
  [www.cancercare.mb.ca](http://www.cancercare.mb.ca)
• Refer to the booklet from the Canadian Cancer Society ‘Eating Well When You Have Cancer: A guide to good nutrition’. If you are a client of the Breast Health Centre, you may have received it in the information package given to you at the time of your diagnosis. It is available on our website at [wrha.mb.ca/bhc](http://wrha.mb.ca/bhc).
Because cells are being killed when you receive chemotherapy and radiation treatment, the need for protein increases. The body uses protein to produce new cells, for healing and to maintain a healthy immune system. The foods that are high in protein are those found in milk/alternatives and meat/alternatives sections of Canada’s Food Guide. There are ideas on how to add protein to your meals and snacks in the booklet “Eating Well When You Have Cancer’. You can increase the protein in your diet by having at least 1 servings of a high protein food every time you eat a meal and a snack. Ideas for a healthy snack include: crackers or raw vegetables served with hummus (chick pea spread) or it might be a glass of milk or a serving of yogurt along with some fruit. A protein powder supplement is not usually required.
Cancer and treatments like chemotherapy can weaken your immune system. Your healthcare team will be watching you closely for signs of this. Usually the immune system recovers before the next chemotherapy treatment. Unless told differently by your oncology team, follow general safe food practices. For example: wash your hands before and after preparing food and before eating. Thaw meat, fish or poultry in the microwave or refrigerator and not on the counter.

A complete list of safe food practices are listed in the ‘Eating Well When You Have Cancer’ booklet. Another source of information is ‘Safe food Handling for People with Weakened Immune System’ by the Government of Canada – healthycanadians.gc.ca.
Soy foods and flaxseed are very high in plant estrogens which are weaker than the estrogen in our bodies. These foods also provide substances that fight cancer. Because of the findings from the earlier research in the lab, people with breast cancer were advised to limit these foods especially soy. However, recent human studies have found that soy foods are safe for breast cancer survivors when eaten as part of a healthy diet. That could be up to 2 servings/day which is the amount consumed in a typical Asian diet.

It appears to be safe to have flaxseed despite its high estrogen content. It too can be eaten in normal amounts as part of a healthy diet.

At this time, it is not known if having large amounts of soy foods or flaxseed would be of any particular benefit to those who have had breast cancer.

If you are taking an aromatase inhibitor type drug, discuss with your health care team whether there is any need to limit soyfoods or flaxseed. Research in ongoing in this area.
Antioxidants protect the cells in our bodies. Examples of antioxidants are: beta-carotene, vitamin C, vitamin E and selenium. There is a concern that large amounts of antioxidants from supplements or pills may interfere with cancer treatments. At present, the use of antioxidant supplements are not recommended during chemotherapy and radiation treatments. Any supplement described as being high in antioxidants should be avoided as well.

Foods high in antioxidants, however, are safe to eat during cancer treatments as part of a varied diet based on Canada’s Food Guide. A daily regular strength multiple vitamin and mineral supplement provides small amounts of nutrients including antioxidant ones and are acceptable to use. If you are taking calcium and vitamin D supplements, they can be continued since they do not act as antioxidants.

If you have questions about antioxidants, speak with your oncology team or the dietitian at the Breast Health Centre.
You may lose weight during treatment but weight gain is more common. It can occur soon after the diagnosis, during and following cancer treatments. This weight gain is thought to be due to many factors, however the experts in the area feel it is mainly because of a change in your physical activity. Eating and exercise habits may change as a result of reduced energy or fatigue, stress, nausea, or a change in appetite. As well, celebrating that treatment has ended and enjoying eating again can lead to overeating.
Bones are a concern as we grow older. Meeting your calcium and vitamin D is important especially if you have had breast cancer. Bone loss may be the result of chemotherapy or some types of hormone therapy.

Contact the dietitian if you want to learn more about your calcium and vitamin D requirements. If you are living in Winnipeg or the surrounding area, you can attend one of the Bone Health after Breast Cancer sessions which will help you learn more about looking after your bones. These sessions are held throughout the year at the WRHA Breast Health Centre and are available through Manitoba TeleHealth upon request. A pharmacist, a dietitian and a physiotherapist present information on how you can keep your bones strong after breast cancer. If you want to attend, register by contacting the dietitian at the WRHA Breast Health Centre.
Often following chemotherapy and radiation therapy, breast cancer survivors are looking for a way of achieving a healthy lifestyle to help reduce the risk of recurrence and to improve their health.

For those living in Winnipeg and the surrounding area, the WRHA Breast Health Centre offers a free program to help with getting your diet and physical activity organized and back on track following breast cancer treatment. The program is lead by a certified fitness instructor, a registered dietitian and a social worker who provide behavioral coaching. Each week the group of 12 participants will learn about and practice exercise, learn about healthy eating and how to achieve it and discuss goal setting and problem solving. Interested individuals can call the dietitian at the Breast Health Centre to book a spot.

Call the dietitian at the Breast Health Centre for more information or to register.
In this part, I will go over some questions that people often ask...

Should I eat organic foods?

There is no reliable evidence showing that organic foods are more effective in reducing cancer risk, recurrence or progression, than foods grown and produced in the usual way. Overall, no difference in their nutritional content has been found. As a dietitian, my main concern is if the organic food is more expensive, you may not be able to purchase every thing that you need to in order to have a healthy diet.
Does sugar “feed” cancer?

- Sugar does not feed cancer
- A healthy diet limits foods high in added sugar

Does sugar feed cancer?

Sugar intake has not been shown to directly increase the risk or progression of cancer. However, sugar adds calories to the diet which can lead to weight gain and poor outcomes. Foods high in sugar are often not high in nutritional content and replace foods that would be healthier to eat.

The other concern is that diets high in sugar may lead to high blood sugar levels which can raise insulin levels. If the insulin levels are constantly high, it may increase the risk of breast cancer along with other cancers. This is more likely to occur among people who are overweight and not physically active or those who have insulin resistance or diabetes in the family. Achieving a healthy weight and lifestyle will help. More will be learned as the research continues in this area.
Are artificial sweeteners safe to use?

Health Canada has approved the use of artificial sweeteners and sugar substitutes. Safe daily intake have been determined. Further information can be found on the Canadian Diabetes Association website [www.diabetes.ca](http://www.diabetes.ca) or on Health Canada’s website [www.hc-sc.gc.ca](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca).
What can I eat to boost my immune system?

There is no evidence that eating one type of food is helpful or that any particular food harms the immune system. The most important thing you can do to support your immune system is to eat a healthy diet and be physically active.
Should I be taking any supplements?

People who have had breast cancer are strongly encouraged to obtain their needed nutrients through foods rather than pills. There is evidence and growing concern that supplements may do more harm than good. The exception is vitamin D. Since vitamin D is not produced by the skin through sun exposure in Canada between October and the end of March, a vitamin D supplement is required. To learn more about vitamin D, you are invited to attend a Bone Health after Breast Cancer session.
Should I juice my vegetables and fruits?

Juicing can add variety and be a good way to increase vegetables and fruit if you are having difficulty chewing or swallowing. However, juice can be less filling and contain less fibre. If you are looking for a healthy drink which provides fibre, consider blenderizing the fruits and vegetables instead. When drinking food rather than eating it, the calories can quickly add up and may lead to unwanted weight gain.
This concludes the presentation on Nutrition following a breast cancer diagnosis. I hope you have found it helpful and it has answered some of your questions.

Most of the information I just discussed is found in our resource pamphlet called “Nutrition Guide, Feeding your body with the right food during breast cancer treatment”. This booklet is available online at wrha.mb.ca/bhc in the Client Education and Resources section, or feel free to call the dietitian to have one mailed out to you. If you have any questions about what was discussed or if you have any other nutrition related questions, please feel free to contact the dietitian at 204-235-3646 or toll-free at 1-886-501-5219.
If there are any questions about what was discussed or if you have any other nutrition related questions, please contact the dietitian at 204-235-3646 or the Toll Free Number in MB 1-888-501-5219
Nutrition resources referred to in this video are available at [wrha.mb.ca/bhc]