



*AICR Ever Green  
Ever Healthy Feature  
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Topic: Cancer*

## **Ovarian Cancer**

by the American Institute for Cancer Research

Ovarian cancer is one of the five most deadly cancers among women in developed countries. Unfortunately, ovarian cancer is difficult to detect through current tests and screenings. Often, it produces no clear symptoms until late in development. But now several different studies show that a mostly plant-based diet can lower risk of ovarian cancer in multiple ways.

In four of the studies that took place within the last two years, more vegetables and fruits reduced the risk of ovarian cancer by one-third to two-thirds. Part of the reason may be the variety of phytochemicals in vegetables and fruits. Some of these substances reveal an ability to fight a broad range of cancers in laboratory tests.

### **Do Not Forget Fiber**

Fiber in vegetables, fruits, whole grains, and beans may play just as important a role as phytochemicals. Another study reports that diets high in fiber are linked to a 57 percent lower risk of ovarian cancer. In Italy, higher consumption of legumes (dried beans and peas) correlated with a 33 percent lower risk.

Because foods with fiber are all plant foods, they naturally contain phytochemicals. So phytoestrogens – phytochemicals that behave like the hormone estrogen – in legumes may be a potent source of protection against ovarian cancer.

### **Sorting Through the Facts on Fat**

A high consumption of fat should be avoided. An analysis of studies involving more than 6,000 women found that those with higher fat consumption faced greater ovarian cancer risk. In particular, eating more animal fat was linked with a 70 percent increase in risk.

Yet, some fats are beneficial. A new study reports 40 percent lower ovarian cancer rates in women with diets highest in omega-3 fat, which is the type found in salmon and other fatty fish, flaxseed, and walnuts. Monounsaturated fat from olive oil may also offer some protection. However, a greater consumption of olive oil may indicate that people eat more cooked vegetables and salads, as they do in Italy. The higher vegetable consumption, not the olive oil, could be the real source of protection.

Excess weight seems to put women at a particularly high risk. In a study of more than 62,000 women, those who were obese were almost 70 percent more likely to develop ovarian cancer than those in a healthy weight range.

More research is needed to better determine who is at risk and exactly what women can do to prevent ovarian cancer. But for the present, a wise course would be to follow the recommendations of the American Institute for Cancer Research (AICR). Eating a mostly plant-based diet, maintaining a healthy weight and exercising regularly can decrease cancer risk 30 to 40 percent. Because ovarian cancer is difficult to detect, women should also talk to their doctors about their specific risk and ways to protect themselves.

To find out more about the potentially devastating disease, cancer, call AICR at 1-800-843-8114, ext. 110, and request *The Cancer Process* brochure.

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