

Eating healthily as well as ethically at the same time - is this really possible?



Prevention of cancer is one of the biggest public health challenges of our time. It has meanwhile been shown that good nutrition, physical activity and a reduced body fat mass can lower the risk of cancer. According to the World Cancer Research Fund (WCRF), up to 30% of all cancers could be prevented by means of a healthy lifestyle and nutritional habits. Scientists also estimate that cancer of the large intestine, for example, could decline by up to 50% if people were to follow a cancer-inhibiting diet. Other studies indicate that the chances of being cured for anyone already diagnosed with cancer can also be improved with this style of nutrition.

Scientific data show that a only a minor proportion of cancers are hereditary. Environmental factors are far more significant and, in many cases, these are controllable and include: smoking, infectious diseases, ionising radiation, industrial waste, environmental pollution, medicines and many aspects of nutrition, physical activity and body fat mass. It must be said, however, that no studies or types of studies can prove that one individual factor is the exclusive cause for a disease nor that it can provide absolute protection against a disease (WCRF report 2007).

The latest findings on what constitutes healthy nutrition are:

- Diversity in the diet (quantity and quality)
- Plenty of grains (wholegrain products: rice, wheat, rye, buckwheat, maize, quinoa, millet, Kamut, etc.) as well as legumes (pulses)
- 600g fruit & vegetables per day (3 portions of vegetables, 2 portions of fruit)
- Fish 1-2x per week.
- High Quality Milk.
- Meat 300-500g per week (eat as few processed meats, e.g. sausages, as possible)
- As little sugar & salt as possible. Use fresh herbes and high quality spices
- Little fat, plant-based fats such as rapeseed and olive oil are preferred.
- 1.5l water or unsweetened tea each day

- Avoid alcohol, only drink occasionally and in moderate quantities (10-20g alcohol per day). Problem: addiction damages the nerves and liver. (40g alcohol each day means a fivefold increase in the risk of developing cancer!)
- Take the time to enjoy your food and take pleasure from it.
- Careful preparation. When making sauces, use stocks, fresh herbs and jus instead of roux, sauce thickeners or other flavour enhancers!
- Ensure that you take exercise and pay attention to body weight

As indicated in the introduction and as the rising frequency of recent media reports show, increasingly undesirable and negative developments in the production and processing of food products are being observed. The day-to-day availability of a large number of food products seems to be steering the processes involved in producing the finished products in such a direction that we receive meat, fruit and vegetables as well as cereal products of a lower quality. This also includes meat products which do not comply with humane animal welfare standards and feeding practices. In such cases, the farm animals are degraded to production machines from which the intention is to extract an ever increasing amount of profit. Animal welfare (species-appropriate animal husbandry), by contrast, focusses on the natural requirements of the animals and also takes their innate needs into consideration. The result is livelier, healthier animals which are also more placid to handle. The argument commonly used that such meat also tastes better shouldn't be the only criterion for this sort of husbandry. The far more important issue is a high-regard for other living creatures and respect for them. Killing (slaughter) of animals – a topic which is often completely concealed from society – should take place in accordance with strict animal protection guidelines. Unfortunately, the reality is that in Germany c. 500,000 pigs are still boiled alive every year, and with cows the captive-bolt device misses the target position in c. 200,000 cases and these animals therefore suffer a painful death (Patrick Hünerefeld: Fleischkonsum: Qualen im Schlachthaus (Meat consumption: torture in the slaughterhouse) BR-online, 30.3.2010, and Albert Schweitzer Stiftung press release, 31.3.2010). Transport to the slaughterhouse, even in compliance with current legal requirements, is often a painful journey on which animals experience exhaustion, dehydration and stress (Albert Schweitzer Stiftung information, 3.8.2013). Regional or even local slaughtering would spare animals a great deal of suffering.

Respect for animals and the killing of them puts the question of whether one should eat more red or white meat into perspective. The more pertinent question is whether one should ever eat meat which has been produced without regard to animal welfare. In terms of the quantity that should ideally be consumed, no excessive additional financial burden is actually involved, so the answer should certainly be yes to meat produced WITH regard to animal welfare!

When thinking about meat, also bear in mind a niche product which fulfils the desired requirements: game meat. The quality of this meat is determined by an intact environment and humane killing by a reliable shot. Wild boar is sometimes an exception in this regard as it can be a victim of the effects of the Chernobyl disaster – measuring radioactivity is a quick way to be certain in this regard.

In the case of native fish, environmental conditions determine the quality. But this resource also has its natural limits and therefore responsible fish farmers take on an important role. Responsibility means fish breeding without growth accelerators, antibiotics and artificial oxygenation – which stimulates the

appetite of the fish – as well as species-appropriate feed.

The milk we drink each day should be healthy and flavoursome i.e. come from animals that have been fed in accordance with their needs. What does this mean in terms of cows? Primarily, little concentrated feed and at least 180 days grazing on natural pasture. Even in winter these cows get enough access to the open-air, sun, fresh air and natural hay. Nutritional medicine, in a recently published German-English study, has shown that organic milk and meat contain 50% more omega 3 fatty acids than conventional products! Organic milk also contains 40% more health-promoting conjugated linoleic acid (CLA) as well as slightly higher amounts of iron, vitamin E and several carotenoids.

Ideally, butter will also be made from organic milk. However, even if organic butter is used it is often criticised by many consumers and this is due to the bad reputation of saturated fatty acids. Yet if eaten in accordance with recommended daily guidelines, butter can actually be regarded as a culinary pleasure rather than a cause for a bad conscience.

And now a topic that has almost become boring: the ongoing discussion about sugar and salt! The problem here concerns their use in production of food products. In many products such as preserves, lemonade and fruit juices they are often “hidden” ingredients, used to improve flavour. For day-to-day habits there is just one rule: avoid these products! And when you are preparing food, use as little sugar and salt as possible.

There is no doubt that, in terms of health, avoiding alcohol is the best option. This is especially true for cancer prevention. A compromise might be more realistic here, however, that is to enjoy 20g of alcohol in the form of wine and beer – but not every day. This amount can actually be beneficial to quality of life. It is not without good reason that we speak of wine and beer culture. And it is not only beer that is at risk in terms of its purity but also wine. Unfortunately, there is a vast number of oenological additives which can be used to improve wine without having to be declared. Therefore, when possible, try to buy directly from a trustworthy winemaker and make a contribution to keeping wine as a genuinely natural product – not only for health reasons but also out of respect for the work carried out in vineyards and wine cellars.

It goes without saying that during cancer treatment alcohol is a no go! Alcohol and medicines – this is a highly explosive mix which is best avoided.

Fruit, vegetables and grains should be purchased from organic farms – not only as this is an important factor in healthy nutrition but also because it has sustainable consequences for our environment due the use of synthetic plant protection products, mineral fertilisers and genetic technology largely being renounced in this sector.

As a doctor and scientist, of course, I frequently reflect on the necessity of studies to investigate various claims. If feasible, they would be certainly helpful – in the best case for the next generation – because as a general rule they have to be long-term studies. One of the key questions would be: which effects would a diet which favours meat produced with disregard to animal welfare, and fruit, vegetables and grains from non-organic sources have on health? Let's assume for a moment that such a study would find that this type of nutrition has no negative effects on health. Would the consequence then be that it is acceptable to continue, unperturbed, to exploit animals and impoverish the soil, or do we still, as a result of our instinct for self-preservation, have an ethical and societal responsibility towards animals and nature?

In order to explore the issues raised and to provide you with helpful recommendations, the Munich Tumour Centre, in collaboration with cooperation partners, would like to draw increased attention to these topics in future, and furthermore, to have an active influence on undesirable and negative developments.

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