



# communicating Food for Health

## Diet Swap Increases Risk of Colon Cancer in Two Weeks

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Colon cancer remains the #1 cancer killer for nonsmokers in the USA. Among Americans, the highest prevalence of colon cancer occurs among those of African descent. However, this is unlikely to be due largely to genes as the prevalence of colon cancer is about 13 times higher in African Americans than it is in Black rural South Africans. The far higher incidence of colon cancer for African Americans is likely associated with their far higher consumption of animal protein and fat, coupled with a much lower fiber consumption than found in the rural South African diet. Diets high in meat and fat and low in fiber lead to increased levels of colonic secondary bile acids, lower amounts of colonic short-chain fatty acids, and higher mucosal proliferative biomarkers of increased cancer risk in otherwise healthy middle-aged volunteers. To shed more light on how a typical American diet

promotes the changes that are believed to lead to the development of colon polyps and colon cancer, a research team led by Dr. Brian O'Keefe at the University of Pittsburg performed a study that involved 2-week food exchanges in subjects from the same populations. In this study, a group of 20 African Americans were fed a high-fiber, low-fat African-style diet, while another group of 20 rural South Africans were fed a high-fat, low-fiber American-style diet. The researchers closely supervised what both groups ate for the next two weeks to assure good compliance with the two very different diet plans. The subjects of this study all underwent a colonoscopy exam before and then again two weeks after the diet swap. At the start of the study, nearly half the American subjects had polyps in their colons, but none of the South Africans had polyps. The majority of colon cancers arise from these precancerous polyps.

(continued on next page)

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*Professional Member Edition*

### Research

Diet and Colon Cancer

### Practitioner Ideas

An Update from the USDA  
MyPlate National Partners in  
Person Meeting

*Client and Consumer Education*

### Handouts: Recipes and Cooking Tips

1. Chocolate Gingerbread Cookies
2. Cheese Ball

### This Month's Handouts

1. Four Tips for Feeding Vegetarians
2. Sous Vide Cooking and Food Safety
3. Healthful Holiday Tips
4. Fortifying Junk Food

*Online: Clipart, Calendar,  
Recipes, PDF Handouts, Articles,  
This Month, Newsletter Archive*

*If Americans stick with a diet that is far lower in fatty animal products and cholesterol and composed largely of whole grains, vegetables, and fruits, then they will reduce the inflammation and other chemical changes that promote colon cancer.*

When the rural South Africans and African Americans adopted each other's typical dietary habits, these dietary changes resulted in remarkable reciprocal changes in mucosal biomarkers of cancer risk. After just two weeks on the African diet, the American subjects' colons showed a reduction in inflammation. In addition, the researchers observed that changes in the cells lining the colon were accompanied by major changes of gut bacteria or microbiota. The changes in these gut microbes are believed to have a major impact on the risk of developing inflammation and polyps, and eventually colon cancer. For example, the increase in saccharolytic fermentation and butyrogenesis observed when the Americans adopted the Africans' diet resulted in suppressed secondary bile acid synthesis. These changes were observed in the African Americans within just two weeks after adopting the rural South African diet that was low in fat and animal products but high in whole plant foods. The reverse changes occurred in the rural South

Africans who adopted the typical American diet for two weeks (1).

The results of Dr. O'Keefe's recent study confirm and extend the findings of a study done decades ago by Dr. R. James Barnard at UCLA. Dr. Barnard and colleagues looked at changes in the amount of secondary bile acids in the stools of people who came to the Pritikin Longevity Center. Prior to attending Pritikin, 11 female subjects kept a 3-day food diary. One year after attending Pritikin, they filled out another 3-day food diary. The diaries showed that these women did a pretty good job of sticking with the largely unprocessed plant-based diet. According to their diet diaries, they maintained calorie intake at a slightly higher level (7% more on average) than while staying at Pritikin Center, but still significantly lower (by 34%) than their pre-Pritikin diaries. Their diets prior to their stay at the Pritikin Center contained 34% fat and 360mg of cholesterol or close to typical American diet norms at that time. Post-Pritikin, at one-year follow-up, calories from

fat averaged only 14% of energy intake and daily dietary cholesterol intake dropped to only 88 mg. Fecal secondary bile acids were also significantly lower after attending Pritikin and these lower levels were also observed a year later. Not surprisingly, serum cholesterol levels were significantly lower at end of their 3 weeks at the Pritikin Longevity Center. But perhaps more importantly, their serum cholesterol levels were also lower a year later while following the diet at home, confirming that the subjects were likely still largely complying with a largely plant-based diet far lower in saturated fat and cholesterol than a typical American diet. These results suggested that switching from a typical American diet high in animal fat and cholesterol and low in fiber to a low-fat, high-fiber diet largely plant-based diet can reduce the excretion of secondary bile acids which are increasingly thought to be involved in the promotion of colon cancer (2)...

*Continued at <https://foodandhealth.com/diet-risk-of-colon-cancer/>.*

## What Consumers Want: An Update from the USDA MyPlate National Partners in Person Meeting

I just got back from the USDA MyPlate National Partners in Person meeting, and boy did I learn a lot!

Much of the discussion revolved around consumers — how to communicate key health messages to them in a way that would resonate, how to keep them engaged in healthful habits, etc.

I thought that you might find this information as useful as I did, so here are my notes from those discussions...

**Phrasing is important.** MyPlate's focus groups found compelling evidence about the impact of several words in particular, especially as they relate to health and reaching health goals.

**"Health"** and **"healthfully,"** for instance, are very well-received buzzwords.

Along those same lines, people respond very well to the idea of a **healthier future**. Perhaps framing your next important nutrition or health lesson in that context will help it be even more compelling for your audience.

Of course, some phrases work better than others. MyPlate's focus groups also revealed that both **"healthy eating style"** and **"healthy eating pattern"** are more engaging and appealing concepts than the word "diet." Consider re-framing discussions of key food groups and healthful meals in terms of healthy eating patterns instead of a healthful diet.

Another element that MyPlate's focus groups revealed was about what people want. **People want healthy eating to be**

**easy**, or at least easier than it is. Often, all the rules and guides and misinformation out there can make it hard to determine what is healthful and what isn't. People also get lost when it comes to ways to prepare healthful and balanced meals quickly, without spending hours in the kitchen each day. What they want is a way to eat healthfully, yet easily. How can we make that happen?

A good place to start is with **MyPlate**, which is an **effective, simple-to-understand graphic** that's also **easy to use**.

Check out MyPlate's new health educator resources, especially the new SuperTracker tools! You can find more information at <http://www.choosemyplate.gov> and <https://www.supertracker.usda.gov>.

I hope you find this information helpful — I was really fascinated by all the research!

### Communicating Food for Health

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