Nutrition for Stage IV Lung, Breast and Colorectal Cancer

Cancer impacts the body in many ways as does the treatment that is required to fight the disease such as surgery, chemotherapy or radiation therapy. Cancer treatments may cause a variety of side effects including loss of appetite, nausea and vomiting, and fatigue that affects the nutritional status of the cancer patient. Loss of appetite is the most common cause of malnutrition in cancer patients. Loss of appetite can occur as early as diagnosis but is frequently experienced as the cancer grows and spreads. Some tumors affect the way nutrients are absorbed and will also result in malnutrition. It may appear the patient is consuming adequate calories, but the tumor may affect the body’s use of protein, carbohydrates, and fats. Other treatment related side effects such as mouth sores, trouble swallowing, pain, diarrhea and constipation can all contribute to malnourishment. Good nutrition is extremely important while undergoing treatment to preserve energy and endurance and to attain better outcomes. Sharlene Bidini, RD, CSO, board certified in oncology nutrition from Oakwood Center for Cancer Care in Dearborn, Michigan states, “There can be serious consequences if the body’s nutritional needs are ignored. It is estimated that one in five cancer patients dies from malnutrition, not the actual cancer.”

Eating well while being treated for cancer can improve the way one feels overall, can improve strength and energy, maintain body weight, maintain the body’s store of nutrients, lower risk of infection, better tolerate treatment related side effects, and to experience a better quality of life. The American Cancer Society illustrates the importance of nutrients, such as protein, fats, carbohydrates, water, vitamins and minerals, in their patient education segments on nutrition for the cancer patient. Proteins are required for growth, repair of damaged body tissue and to keep our immune systems healthy. If this nutrient is deficient, it may take longer to recover from illness and lower resistance to infections. Fats serve as a source of energy for the body and insulates body tissues. Carbohydrates are the body’s major source of energy and can provide the fuel the body needs for physical activity and facilitating organ function. Water and liquids are vital as all body cells need water to function.
Because nutrition is such an importance piece of cancer care, the cancer program at Carolinas HealthCare System Blue Ridge has several avenues to assist patients with eating well. Our program can offer nutritional consults to eligible patients through our affiliation with Carolinas HealthCare System Levine Cancer Institute. These nutritional consults are offered virtually, connecting our patients to a dietician in Charlotte, with specific knowledge of oncology nutritional needs. Our cancer program can also offer the nutrient rich liquid meal replacement so the patient can strive to maintain a healthy weight throughout treatment. Our program provides the liquid meal replacement, Boost, to patients who are needy of nutritional supplementation regardless of stage or site of disease. Each case of Boost contains 24 eight ounce cans and comes in a variety of flavors including vanilla, chocolate and strawberry.

102 cancer patients under treatment received nutritional supplementation in 2015, receiving in total 341 cases of Boost. 75% maintained (or experienced less than a 10% weight loss) or improved their weight after receiving nutritional supplementation. The cancer program at Carolinas HealthCare System Blue Ridge is an accredited cancer program and is accredited through the American College of Surgeons. A requirement of an accredited cancer program is to establish a clinical goal. The clinical goal established by our program was that 75% of Stage IV lung, breast, or colorectal patients maintain (or experience less than a 10% weight loss) or improve their weight after receiving nutritional supplementation. 34 of the 102 cancer patients under treatment were Stage IV lung, breast or colorectal cancers. Of the 34 patients, 24 were Stage IV lung, 4 were Stage IV breast, and 6 were Stage IV colorectal cancer. These 34 patients received 93 cases of Boost. 79% maintained weight or improved weight post nutritional supplementation.

34 of the 102 patients were Stage IV lung, breast or colorectal cancer. Of the 34 patients, 24 were Stage IV lung, 4 were Stage IV breast; and 6 were Stage IV colorectal. These 34 patients received 93 cases of Boost. 79% of our Stage IV breast, lung and colorectal cancer patients maintained, experienced less
than a 10% weight loss, or improved their weight after receiving nutritional supplementation. Of all 102 patients receiving nutritional supplementation, 76% maintained, experienced less than a 10% weight loss, or improved their weight after receiving nutritional supplementation.

Carolinas HealthCare System Blue Ridge Cancer Center is committed to the supportive care of our patients. Successful fund raising efforts have enabled our program to offer nutritional consultations and nutritional supplements to our patients free of charge, thereby relieving the patient of an additional financial burden.