

Flavour, nutrition and cancer

The NIHR Cancer and Nutrition Collaboration and World Cancer Research Fund were pleased to deliver a session on 9 November 2021 called ‘*Cooking for people living with and beyond cancer: experts and patients discussing taste, nutrition and science*’ at the recent NCRI Virtual Festival. We heard different perspectives from two patient representatives, a dietitian, a clinician and a sensory scientist about healthy eating for people living with and beyond cancer, focusing on the impact of cancer treatment on sense of taste. WCRF’s Survivorship Programme Manager and Nutritionist Melissa Mogor presented a demonstration of two mouth-watering recipes from the new ‘**Flavour and Nutrition**’ cookbook. These recipes have been specifically formulated for anyone living with and beyond cancer.

Anjana, who was treated for breast and ovarian cancer, and Dave, who was treated for oesophageal cancer, shared that during treatment they experienced side-effects such as taste changes, nausea, reduced appetite, weight loss and finding it difficult to maintain a balanced diet. At least 50% of patients report some change in taste during cancer treatment. Consultant Dietitian Dr Clare Shaw explained that it is common to lose weight during treatment, which can be a problem because weight loss can result in a reduced tolerance to cancer treatment.

The first recipe Melissa demonstrated was a roast garlic daal. This is a straightforward yet delicious dish that is economical to make and can easily be made in bulk to feed the whole family or keep you going for a few days. It has a high protein content, which is important in reducing the risk of muscle loss (called sarcopenia). About 50% of people with cancer have low muscle mass compared with about 15% of the general population.



Image 1: WCRF’s Survivorship Programme Manager and Nutritionist Melissa Mogor preparing the basil cannelloni

The second dish was basil cannelloni, a dish packed full of both flavour and nutrients. Stuffed with ricotta cheese, this dish would be ideal if you are experiencing mouth ulcers from your treatment, as the dish is soft to eat. Both Anjana and Dave endorsed the two recipes and vouched for their desirable flavour and texture. Sensory scientist Dr Stella Lignou also explained that the lemon in the dish triggers the sour taste receptors and helps

the person eating appreciate the food more, and mushroom which has a savoury note makes the food more palatable. She further stated that the sense of smell is equally important in experiencing your food. If you are struggling to smell, ensuring your food is hot could help you smell your food more strongly, which would help you enjoy the taste more. On the other hand, if you are very sensitive to smells, eating your food cold could make it more tolerable.



Image 2: Basil Cannelloni

Chair of the session and retired supportive care clinician Prof Sam Ahmedzai welcomed the high quality of questions which came into the session, showing that both professionals and patients/public are eager for more information on healthy eating.

Unfortunately, not all people living with and beyond cancer have access to an oncology dietitian, as it is not provided by all hospital trusts. It is difficult to generalise advice because everyone might experience slightly different side-effects. Our panel encouraged patients to speak to their Clinical Nurse Specialist if they have concerns about dietary symptoms and would like to speak to a specialist dietitian. Charities such as WCRF have helpful and easy-to-understand information on nutrition, diet and physical activity and support for anyone who has been affected by cancer which is evidence-based and has been peer reviewed, so patients know they can trust the information.

Prof Ahmedzai thanked the patient representatives for sharing their experiences, Melissa for her cooking demonstrations, and NCRI for supporting this session. We hope this will be the first of many events held by the NIHR Cancer & Nutrition Collaboration with WCRF UK, as the two organisations have recently entered an exciting partnership. Read more about this and find out how to access more advice for patients and professionals on our [website](#).



*Image 3 panel members (L-R) Top row: Ms Anjana Tivegna, Dr Clare Shaw, Mr Dave Chuter
Bottom row: Prof Sam Ahmedzai, Dr Stella Lignou*