Proper diet habits may reduce risk of cancer

The shocking truth about cancer is that one out of every four Americans now living will have it. Some experts say what makes matters worse is that as many as one-third of those cancers may be caused by what we eat.

“Cancers of the large intestine, cancer of the breast and perhaps cancer of the prostate can most likely be blamed on the American diet, with its high fat content and low fiber intake,” says Dr. John S. Bolton, an oncology surgeon and co-director of the Ochsner Cancer Institute in New Orleans.

The American diet is so bad, says Bolton, that when people move from other countries to the U.S., their chances of getting breast or colon cancer increase as they adapt to the American style of eating. One study, done on Japanese who moved to the United States, proved just that. Bolton says this group is discovering that forty-percent of the typical American caloric intake comes from fat, a number three times higher than most countries in the world.

Just what is the relationship between diet and cancer?

According to Bolton, dietary fat passes into the large intestine, where bacteria chemically convert some of the fat molecules into cancer-causing substances (carcinogens).

If these carcinogens remain in the intestine for a while, they begin to act on the cells exposed to them. It also seems plausible that some of the carcinogens produced in the intestines are absorbed and carried to other parts of the body, such as breasts, where they may accumulate and initiate cancers.

Carcinogens are in the air, food, cigarette smoking and certain chemicals. They cause DNA codes to undergo breaks, to run amok, destroy genes and turn normal cells into cancer cells.

Currently there is no effective means of reducing cancer but there are measures you can take through diet to lower the risks of cancer: cut down on fats, increase fiber-containing foods and keep trim, says Bolton.

“Cutting out a lot of fried foods is the best way of reducing fatty intake,” he says. “If you are eating meat, choose a leaner cut and reduce the size of the portion you eat. Always trim fat off.”

Poultry without the skin is very nutritious and is low in fat, but remember not to deep fry it in a batter as is done in fast food restaurants. You lose the advantage of the leaner poultry, you are eating a tremendous number of calories and you are getting fatty acids that you don’t need, he says.

Fiber-containing foods, such as fresh or frozen fruits, vegetables, whole grain cereals and whole grain breads, may reduce your chances of getting cancer. Bolton advises you to choose non-fat dairy products, low-fat salad dressings, and fruit for dessert instead of high fat dessert.

Keeping trim is also very important because a direct link has been found between cancer and people who are obese or overweight, says Bolton. “If you are 40 percent overweight, you have a higher risk of cancer of the uterus and cancer of the breast, because fat cells affect the levels of estrogen in the body. Sensible eating habits and regular exercise will help you avoid excessive weight gain,” Bolton says.

“It is impossible to control all risk factors, such as your family health history, but you can protect yourself by taking control of your lifestyle in ways that may reduce your cancer risks,” Bolton concludes.