



Which Beans Best Block The Spread of Cancer

With reference to Michael Greger M.D. FACLM on June 11, 2026



It has been proven that plant phytochemicals are able to inhibit nearly every step of the invasion-metastasis cascade.

Which legumes are best at inhibiting the matrix metalloproteinase enzymes that allow cancer to become invasive?

Although we're spending billions of dollars on fancy new types of chemotherapy, the overflowing prediction is that cancer treatment is expected to rise by about 70% over the next two decades because drugs are being used to merely mop up the mess rather than turn off the faucet. You can't really give drugs to people to prevent cancer because of the side effects and cost, but there is said to be "overwhelming...evidence that the dietary bioactive compounds found in whole plant-based foods have significant anticancer and chemopreventive [cancer-preventing] properties."

I've previously talked about the impact of diet and nutrition on the 10 hallmarks of cancer. The bottom line is that evidence points to a diet that includes minimal animal products and, perhaps more importantly, maximal plant foods. Some foods that seem to be especially beneficial include fruits (especially berries), vegetables (especially greens), legumes (beans, split peas, chickpeas, and lentils), nuts and seeds (especially flaxseeds), onions, garlic, mushrooms, herbs and spices (for example, turmeric), and, as a beverage, green tea.

Chemotherapy may not even be particularly good at mopping up the mess. "Cancer drugs often impair quality of life and fail to extend patient survival." Let me say that another way: You're paying for drugs—maybe selling your house to pay for drugs—that may just be making your life worse for no benefit. Some have suggested we demand at least three months of extended life from pharmaceuticals, but if we demand that chemo actually works, would companies give up testing new cancer drugs altogether? On the other hand, by requiring clinically important benefits—what a concept—maybe Big Pharma would reallocate resources toward targeting the more critical cancer processes like metastatic spread, since it's the tumor metastasis that accounts for 90% of cancer-related deaths. Who cares if some drug shrinks your primary tumor if it's spreading and cutting your life just as short?

What about controlling metastatic cancer with some of those natural bioactive compounds in plants? Evidently, "it has been proven that [plant] phytochemicals

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How Big Is the Cancer Risk from Processed Meat?

nutritionfacts.org June 4, 2026

Processed meats such as bacon, ham, sausages, hot dogs, and lunch meats are classified by the World Health Organization as carcinogenic, with strong evidence linking them to colorectal cancer. Research suggests that eating just one serving of processed meat daily can increase colorectal cancer risk, while reducing consumption may help lower cancer risk and contribute to better overall health outcomes.

Do Fruits and Vegetables Boost Our Mood?

nutritionfacts.org September 4, 2025

Psychological health includes both the absence of mental illness and the presence of well-being, and consuming more fruits and vegetables has been associated with greater happiness, life satisfaction, and even physical health benefits, like improved blood pressure and longevity.

Interventional trials show that actually providing people with fruits and vegetables—not just advising them to eat them—can improve psychological well-being within weeks, highlighting the potential value of public health efforts that include direct access to fresh produce.

Fighting Cancer with Whole Plant Foods

nutritionfacts.org March 10, 2026

Cancer develops over decades, not overnight. Most common cancers grow silently for more than 20 years, which means prevention—not just treatment—is crucial.

Although there are more than 200 types of cancer, they all share the same 10 hallmarks. Whole plant foods contain diverse bioactive compounds that influence all the hallmarks of cancer, something single-focus drugs rarely achieve. All the nutrients create a vast number of possible interactions, an example of the whole being greater than the sum of its parts, a concept known as food synergy.



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are able to inhibit nearly every step of the invasion-metastasis cascade,” at least in vitro (in a petri dish).

All of these foods are shown to block all sorts of cancer-signaling pathways, but let me focus on one: matrix metalloproteinases (MMPs). Since about 90% of cancer disability and death is due to cancer spreading (metastasis), let’s talk about MMPs, which “actively participate in the whole metastatic journey.” Matrix metalloproteinases are enzymes that allow the cancer to tunnel through the surrounding flesh and invade the lymph or blood vessels, and then enable it to burrow in and grow somewhere else.

So, Big Pharma developed matrix metalloproteinase inhibitor drugs, which worked great in animal models but caused severe side effects in humans. So, what about using food? There are special proteins in legumes (beans, split peas, chickpeas, and lentils) that reduce MMP activity. But which is the leading legume? Researchers tested eight different kinds: lupin beans, chickpeas, split peas, black-eyed peas, lentils, more common beans (like kidney, black, or pinto), fava beans, and soybeans. Which do you think worked best?

Without any beans, the matrix metalloproteinase activity churned away at around 100%, and dripping on some protein from split peas didn’t seem to help much, but the black-eyed peas, lentils, common beans, and fava beans cut enzyme activity by more than 50%. Guess what slashed activity by more than 90%? Lupin beans, chickpeas, and soybeans!

But does this translate into slowing down the cancer’s spread?

Researchers plated a layer of human colon cancer cells in a petri dish and then took a razor blade to clear a strip down the middle. Within 48 hours, the cancer quickly converged to fill the gap. But when a little protein from lupin beans, chickpeas, or soybeans was dripped on, it looked like the cancer cells struggled to close the distance.

Okay, but they used raw beans. You don’t know if these anti-cancer proteins are destroyed by cooking until you put it to the test. Researchers found that the matrix metalloproteinase inhibitors in soybeans, at least, did remain active after cooking.

So, maybe it’s no wonder that eating legumes reduces the risk of colorectal cancer. Yes, but colon cancer, which sprouts from the inner lining of the colon, could potentially come in contact with some of these bean proteins. Presumably, they wouldn’t get into the bloodstream.

Those following a vegetarian diet appear to have significantly lower levels of matrix metalloproteinases (MMPs), likely due to reduced inflammation, similar to non-smokers. This is beneficial because MMPs are linked not only to cancer but also autoimmune diseases and cardiovascular disease. These enzymes can damage inflamed, cholesterol-filled artery plaques, increasing the risk of rupture. While plant-based diets are known to reduce heart disease risk, many may not realize they are also associated with a lower cancer risk, especially with mostly plant-based diets.



Unfried Refried Beans



Ingredients:

- 3 c cooked cannellini beans, drained and rinsed
- 1 small red onion chopped
- ½ t garlic powder
- ½ t turmeric powder
- 1½ t smoked paprika
- pinch black pepper

Method:

In a skillet, **cook** the onion with a splash of water for 7 minutes or until soft. You can keep **adding** water to stop the onion from burning or sticking to the pan.

Rinse the beans and **transfer** into a microwave-safe bowl.

Heat in the microwave for 30 seconds. Use a potato masher or a fork to **mash** the beans until they become a paste.

Add spices and mix well. Then add the onion and mix again.

