

Breast Health: Nourishment, Healing Support & Prevention

By Dr. Akmal Muwwakkil, Ph.D., LAc

Breast Cancer Awareness Month reminds us that nourishment, movement, SelfCare, and timely medical care belong together. Healthy habits can lower breast cancer risk and support well-being during treatment. *Digestive enzymes, probiotics, and micronutrient supplements have not been established as methods to prevent or treat breast cancer, however there is evidence of them enhancing the quality of life and longevity.* Their role is to address specific nutritional or digestive needs.

Nourish your body. Choose colorful vegetables, whole fruits, beans, whole grains, and adequate protein. During treatment, sufficient calories, protein, and fluids help maintain strength. An oncology dietitian can adapt to meals when nausea, poor appetite, or digestive changes make eating difficult.

Support digestion when needed. Digestive enzymes help break down food, but supplements are not necessary for everyone. Prescription pancreatic enzymes can improve digestion and nutrient absorption when the pancreas does not produce enough enzymes. Persistent diarrhea, greasy stools, or unexplained weight loss warrant evaluation rather than simply adding an enzyme blend. Enzyme products are not proven breast cancer therapies.

Use probiotics selectively. Certain probiotic strains may help with specific digestive problems, including some treatment-associated diarrhea, but benefits depend on the strain and situation. They are not proven to prevent breast cancer. Obtain oncology approval before using them during treatment, especially with low white blood cell counts or weakened immunity, because live microorganisms can occasionally cause serious infections.

Meet micronutrient needs thoughtfully. Vitamins and minerals support normal body functions, but more is not always better. Calcium and vitamin D may be recommended to protect bones, particularly when breast cancer hormone treatment contributes to bone loss. Other supplements should address an identified deficiency or dietary gap. A standard multivitamin may be considered when intake is inadequate; avoid high doses unless prescribed. High-dose antioxidant supplements, including vitamins C and E, may interfere with some cancer treatments.

Move, restore, and stay informed. Regular physical activity, a healthy weight, and avoiding alcohol can lower breast cancer risk. During treatment, adapt activity to your medical team's guidance. Make room for rest, gentle breathing, and supportive relationships. Discuss your family history and mammogram schedule with your clinician and promptly report new breast changes. Screening supports early detection; it does not prevent cancer.

Choose a personal plan. Review every herb, enzyme, probiotic, and vitamin with your oncology team. The goal is to support nourishment, comfort, and recovery while preserving the effectiveness of your treatment.

Nourish Your Mind: Breast Cancer Mental Health Through TCM & Nutrition

Breast cancer can bring fear, grief, anger, and uncertainty. These feelings deserve care and understanding. You do not have to remain positive all the time, and difficult emotions do not mean you caused your cancer.

The TCM perspective. Traditional Chinese Medicine connects emotional well-being with the Heart's *Shen*—our mental and emotional life—and associates the Liver with the smooth movement of Qi, the Spleen with worry and nourishment, the Lungs with grief, and the Kidneys with fear. These are traditional concepts rather than established biological explanations of cancer. They offer a framework for caring for the whole person through rest, nourishment, gentle movement, and emotional expression.

Practice calming SelfCare. Set aside a few minutes for comfortable, unforced breathing, mindfulness, or gentle Qigong adapted to your condition. Qigong and Tai Chi may support sleep and reduce fatigue, while mindfulness can help ease anxiety and distress during cancer care. Coordinate movement with your healthcare team, particularly after surgery.

Nourish the mind through food. Eat regular meals with adequate protein, whole grains, vegetables, fruits, and fluids. When appetite is low, smaller meals and nourishing snacks may be easier. Addressing poor nutrition, sleep difficulties, and fatigue may also help with concentration problems during treatment. An oncology dietitian can identify nutritional gaps and guide supplementation when needed; supplements do not replace mental health care.

Allow yourself support. Speak with trusted loved ones, a counselor, or a cancer support group. Tell your care team about persistent sadness, anxiety, loss of interest, or difficulty managing daily life. Counseling and, when appropriate, medication can help. Emotional care is part of your healing support—not a test of your strength.