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What Is the Budwig Diet, and Does It Prevent Cancer?



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The Budwig Diet is often used as a complementary or alternative treatment for cancer.

It involves several dietary modifications intended to slow the spread of cancer cells in your body. While proponents claim that it's an effective way to fight cancer, it's highly controversial and backed by little to no scientific research.

This article examines the potential benefits and side effects of the Budwig Diet to determine whether it combats cancer.




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What is the Budwig Diet?

The Budwig Diet was developed in the 1950s by German researcher Dr. Johanna Budwig. It was intended to improve cell function to reduce the growth and spread of cancer cells.

The plan involves eating multiple servings of [cottage cheese](#) and flaxseed oil per day, along with other foods like fruits and vegetables. Meanwhile, it eliminates added sugars, refined grains, processed meats, and other processed foods (1 )

Although the diet was originally geared toward cancer prevention, its advocates assert that it improves other aspects of health, including immune function, arthritis, and [heart health](#).

Yet, a lack of research means that its effects on cancer are largely unknown.

SUMMARY

Originally developed in the 1950s, the Budwig Diet has you eat multiple servings of flaxseed oil and cottage cheese per day. You're also meant to limit your intake of processed and refined foods.

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How it works

According to Budwig, eating high amounts of polyunsaturated fats from foods like flaxseed oil and cottage cheese could help slow the growth and spread of cancer cells (1[✓]).

Therefore, people on the diet eat a mixture of flaxseed oil, cottage cheese, and honey multiple times per day. Typically, this “Budwig mixture” is made by combining cottage cheese and flaxseed oil in a 2:1 ratio, alongside a small amount of [honey](#).

You’re encouraged to eat at least 2 ounces (60 mL) of flaxseed oil and 4 ounces (113 grams) of cottage cheese per day. This concoction should be prepared fresh at each meal and eaten within 20 minutes.

[High fiber foods](#) are also recommended, including fruits and vegetables.

Conversely, you should avoid sugar, refined grains, processed meat, and other processed foods.

In addition to adjusting your diet, you should spend at least 20 minutes outside each day, which is believed to help stimulate immune function and increase levels of vitamin D.

Furthermore, you’re told to follow the diet for at least 5 years to maximize its potential benefits.

SUMMARY

The Budwig Diet claims to help slow the growth of cancer cells by increasing your intake of polyunsaturated fats and high fiber fruits and vegetables.

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Does the diet have any health benefits?

The Budwig Diet prioritizes unprocessed whole foods like fruits and vegetables, which are rich in important nutrients like vitamins, minerals, and [antioxidants](#).

Some research associates an increased intake of fruits and veggies with a lower risk of certain types of cancer ([2](#), [3](#)).

Although no studies have been conducted on the Budwig mixture, test-tube and animal research has indicated that flaxseed oil may possess cancer-fighting properties ([4](#), [5](#), [6](#)).

For example, a 40-day study in mice found that administering 0.3 mL of flaxseed oil reduced the formation of lung tumors ([7](#)).

Flaxseed oil is also high in heart-healthy omega-3 fatty acids, which may help reduce inflammation, decrease blood pressure, and protect against heart disease ([8](#), [9](#)).

Furthermore, the Budwig Diet eliminates processed foods, including convenience meals, refined grains, and [junk foods](#).

Notably, one study linked a 10% increase in ultra-processed food intake to a 10% increase in overall cancer risk — and breast cancer risk specifically ([10](#)).

Moreover, processed meats have been tied to a higher risk of heart disease, diabetes, and certain cancers ([10](#)).

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SUMMARY

The Budwig Diet eliminates processed foods and meats while encouraging fruits, vegetables, and flaxseed oil, all of which may aid cancer prevention and overall health.

Potential downsides

You should consider the Budwig Diet's many potential downsides before starting this eating plan.


Limited research

The biggest drawback of the Budwig Diet is the absence of clinical trials to evaluate its effectiveness.

In fact, most available evidence on the Budwig Diet is purely anecdotal. Therefore, it's difficult to determine whether this eating pattern has any effect on cancer.

While certain aspects of the diet may help reduce the risk of this disease and improve your overall health, you should never consider it — or any other diet — as a cancer treatment.

Furthermore, some variations include unsafe practices like [coffee enemas](#), which involve injecting coffee into the rectum.

Coffee enemas are associated with several serious adverse side effects, including skin burns, [electrolyte imbalances](#), and rectum and colon inflammation (11 ) .

May cause nutrient deficiencies

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Although meat is not banned entirely, certain types are only permitted in limited amounts.

Meat, fish, and poultry are rich in several important nutrients, including protein, iron, zinc, and B vitamins. If you don't get these nutrients from other sources, you may raise your risk of [nutritional deficiencies](#) (12 ✓).

In fact, studies show that vegans and vegetarians may have a higher risk of iron, vitamin B12, protein, and calcium deficiencies (13 ✓).

Additionally, because the diet is highly restrictive, it may contribute to weight loss, which may be [dangerous for people with cancer](#).

People with cancer are in a hypermetabolic state, meaning their overall calorie and protein needs are increased. If proper nutrient intake isn't maintained, which is common on restrictive diets like the Budwig diet, it may result in weight loss and muscle wasting, or cachexia (14 ✓).

Additionally, people who have cancer may lose their appetite and only be able to tolerate certain foods, which is why restrictive diets aren't typically recommended for cancer treatment, unless they're prescribed and monitored by a cancer treatment team (15 ✓).

Although this diet isn't recommended for cancer treatment, if you decide to follow it or any other diet, it's important to ensure that you enjoy a variety of nutrient-dense foods and consider taking supplemental nutrients to fill any gaps in your diet.

Contains high amounts of flaxseed oil


The Budwig Diet stipulates eating large amounts of flaxseed oil.

For some people, this oil may cause digestive issues and diarrhea (16 ✓).

Consuming lots of flaxseed oil is likewise discouraged if you're [pregnant](#), breastfeeding, or taking blood sugar medication (17 ✓).

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you're taking any medications or have any underlying health conditions (18 )

SUMMARY

The Budwig Diet hasn't been studied in any clinical trials and is based on anecdotal evidence. It also contains high amounts of flaxseed oil and is very restrictive, which may cause nutrient deficiencies.

Foods to eat and avoid

The Budwig Diet restricts numerous foods while encouraging others.

Foods to eat

The “Budwig mixture,” which consists of flaxseed oil, cottage cheese, and honey, is a key component of the diet.

Although other types of dairy like [yogurt](#) or quark — a strained, curdled dairy product — are sometimes swapped in for cottage cheese, the flaxseed oil in this mixture is essential.

Other foods encouraged on the Budwig Diet include:

- **Fruits:** apples, oranges, bananas, berries, kiwi, mango, peaches, and plums
- **Vegetables:** broccoli, cabbage, cucumbers, tomatoes, carrots, kale, and spinach
- **Legumes:** lentils, beans, [chickpeas](#), and peas
- **Fruit juices:** grape, apple, grapefruit, and pineapple juice
- **Nuts and seeds:** almonds, walnuts, pistachios, chia seeds, flax

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- **Dairy products:** yogurt, cottage cheese, goat's milk, and raw cow's milk
- **Oils:** flaxseed and olive oil
- **Beverages:** herbal tea, green tea, and water

Foods to avoid

Processed foods, added sugars (apart from honey), refined grains, and hydrogenated fats are all off-limits on the Budwig Diet.

Although many types of meat, fish, poultry, and free-range eggs are permitted in small amounts, pork, shellfish, and processed meats are banned.

The main foods to avoid on the Budwig Diet include:

- **Meats and seafood:** pork and [shellfish](#)
- **Processed meats:** bacon, bologna, salami, and hot dogs
- **Refined grains:** pasta, white bread, crackers, chips, and white rice
- **Sugars:** table sugar, brown sugar, molasses, agave, and corn syrup
- **Soy products:** tofu, tempeh, soy milk, edamame, and soybeans
- **Fats and oils:** margarine, [butter](#), and hydrogenated vegetable oil
- **Processed foods:** cookies, convenience meals, baked goods, french fries, pretzels, and candy

SUMMARY

The Budwig Diet instructs you to eat several servings of flaxseed oil and cottage cheese, alongside high fiber foods like fruits and vegetables. Processed foods, sugars, and refined grains are banned.

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3-day sample menu

Here is a 3-day sample menu for the Budwig Diet.

Day 1

- **Breakfast:** quark with flaxseed oil, fresh fruit, chopped nuts, and honey
- **Lunch:** a carrot and [beetroot](#) salad with cottage cheese and flaxseed oil dressing
- **Dinner:** a vegetable stir-fry with herbed brown rice pilaf
- **Snacks:** fresh-pressed juice and cucumbers with [hummus](#)

Day 2

- **Breakfast:** cottage cheese oatmeal with flaxseed oil, honey, nut butter, and [berries](#)
- **Lunch:** a cranberry kale salad with cottage cheese and flaxseed oil dressing
- **Dinner:** lentils with steamed spinach and buckwheat
- **Snacks:** sliced [pears](#) and celery with guacamole

Day 3

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- **Lunch:** a cucumber tomato salad with cottage cheese and flaxseed oil dressing
- **Dinner:** boiled [potatoes](#) with garlic-roasted broccoli and chickpeas
- **Snacks:** a fruit salad and roasted [almonds](#)

SUMMARY

The 3-day meal plan above provides some meal and snack ideas for the Budwig Diet.

The bottom line

The Budwig Diet is intended to [slow the growth of cancer cells](#) in your body. However, it's very restrictive and not backed by scientific research.

All the same, it promotes several healthy food groups. You're meant to eat a mixture of [flaxseed oil](#) and cottage cheese routinely, as well as high fiber foods like fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.

If you're interested in trying the Budwig Diet, know that it shouldn't be considered a cancer treatment. Be sure to consult your healthcare provider to ensure that you'll meet your nutritional needs.

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