No, Asparagus Does Not Cure Cancer

A meme making the rounds claims that the vegetable can cure cancer—despite no evidence.

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Asparagus holds a place in the pantheon of dubious foods to which many people have attributed fantastical therapeutic properties, transforming grocery store staples into simple and natural answers to major medical problems. Of late, a meme has been going around claiming the green, stalky vegetable, disliked by children far and wide, has the capacity to "detoxify" the body and cure cancer.

USA Today fact-checked the claim and determined it was categorically false. There is no evidence backing the claim that asparagus, a nutrient-rich food with a rightful place in a healthy diet (even if it makes one's pee smell funny), can actually treat or cure any type of cancer.

The meme cites what it claims is an article in Cancer News Journal from 1979 that supposedly recounts cases of people with multiple forms of cancer being cured through "asparagus therapy." But it would seem there is no such journal article, as USA Today's sleuths could find no official record of it or its alleged author.

Indeed, asparagus is rich in glutathione, which is known to have potent anticancer and antioxidant properties. However, when asparagus is digested, glutathione gets broken down. This means it doesn't go into the bloodstream or anywhere in the body where cancer may lurk.

Additionally, scientists have not found that histones found in foods—asparagus is one such food—cure cancer.

Then there's L-asparagine, which is found in asparagus juice. A study published in Nature found that the body can synthesize this amino acid on its own and that it doesn't need supplementation from the diet.

The USA Today piece stressed that many studies have shown the benefit of consuming a healthy diet rich in fiber, fruits and vegetables—yes, including asparagus, if that's to an individual's taste. Such a healthy diet can indeed help prevent certain cancer and other diseases.

But the notion that asparagus in particular can actually treat and cure cancer remains a fantasy.

To read the USA Today article, click here.

To read the American Institute for Cancer Research article, click here.

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