

# Plant-Based Diets Lower Colorectal Cancer Risk in Men

Study findings underline the importance of incorporating healthy plant foods and reducing meat consumption to lower the risk of CRC.

January 25, 2023 By [Colon Cancer Foundation](#)

---

Colorectal cancer (CRC), the third [most common cancer](#) and the third leading cause of cancer-related deaths in the U.S., is preventable with regular screening. In addition to routine screening, other modifiable risk factors, such as diet, play an important role in lowering the risk of CRC. For example, red and processed meats are associated with an increased risk for CRC, while [diets rich in dietary fiber](#) reduce the risk of CRC.

A [recent prospective cohort study](#) discovered that plant-based diets rich in healthy plant foods were associated with a lower risk of CRC in men, and varied based on race, ethnicity, and tumor location. These findings signify the importance of incorporating healthy plant foods into diets and reducing meat consumption to lower the risk of CRC.

The multiethnic cohort study included 79,952 men and 93,475 women. Three plant-based diet scores were investigated to determine the incidence of invasive CRC:

- Overall plant-based diet index (PDI)
- Healthful plant-based diet index (hPDI)
- Unhealthful plant-based diet index (uPDI)

The participants completed a food frequency questionnaire with over 180 food items. PDI, hPDI, and uPDI were calculated based on scoring methods and defined food groups that included:

- Healthy plant foods, such as whole grains, fruits, vegetables, vegetable oils, nuts, legumes, tea, and coffee.
- Less healthy plant foods, such as refined grains, fruit juices, potatoes, and added sugars.
- Animal foods, such as animal fat, dairy, eggs, fish and seafood, and meat.

Each food group was associated with specific scores.

- High PDI scores demonstrated greater consumption of all types of plant foods.
- High hPDI foods showed greater consumption of healthy plant foods and lower consumption of less healthy plant foods.
- Higher uPDI scores demonstrated lower consumption of healthy plant foods and greater consumption of less healthy plant foods.

The study found that a plant-based diet that includes natural, rather than processed, plant-based foods is associated with a reduced risk of CRC in men. For women, however, none of the plant-based diets were significantly associated with CRC risk. For both men and women, the average scores of PDI and hPDI were highest among Japanese Americans and lowest among Native Hawaiians. The mean uPDI was highest in Native Hawaiian men and lowest in African American men and white women. Men with higher scores for PDI and hPDI had a 24% and 21% lower risk of CRC than men with lower scores for those diets, respectively. Furthermore, no significant association was found between risk for CRC and uPDI for men.

These analyses highlight the potential significance of plant-based diets in preventing CRC and suggest that the benefits of plant-based diets can vary based on sex and race/ethnicity. The findings underscore the importance of increasing healthy and less-processed plant foods in our diet and reducing meat consumption to lower the risk of CRC.

This story was published by [Colon Cancer Foundation](#) on January 9, 2023. It is republished with permission.