



Cancer Care

AUGUST 2026

Standing in front of this colorful summer produce, Left to Right, are Jim Pyle; Keegan Zavodnik, RDN, LDN; and Matt Labriola, MD.

Food for Thought: Experts Discuss Diets and Cancer

By D'Ann George

When Jim Pyle's prostate cancer diagnosis advanced to oligometastatic, he began paying closer attention to nutrition. Like many people living with cancer, he had heard plenty of advice about what to eat—and what to avoid—but wanted to know what was backed by research.

"If there is research behind a cancer diet, I want to know about it," Pyle said.

That question guided a recent webinar from Duke Supportive Care and Survivorship Center, moderated by Matt Labriola, MD, a genitourinary oncologist. During the webinar, still available at the link below, expert cancer dietitians from Duke discussed three eating approaches that frequently come up in cancer care: plant-based eating, ketogenic diets and intermittent fasting. The dietitians included Jessica Wallis, MPH, RD, LDN; Savannah McKee, MS, RD, LDN; and Keegan Zavodnik, RDN, LDN.

Their central message: nutrition during and after cancer treatment is personal. The best approach depends on a person's diagnosis, treatment, symptoms, weight, and overall health. Before making major changes, patients should talk with their oncology team or a cancer dietitian.

Moving Beyond Diet Myths

Pyle was especially interested in the discussion of sugar. "I was quite surprised that they said that sugar doesn't affect prostate cancer that much," he said. "I had always thought that prostate cancer feeds on sugar."

McKee explained why that idea can be misleading. Cancer cells use glucose, but so do healthy cells—including the cells that support the immune system and help the body tolerate treatment. Completely avoiding carbohydrates does not "starve" cancer. The body can still make sugar from other sources, and it may use muscle tissue to do so.

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Duke Cancer Institute

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Instead, the dietitians encouraged patients to focus on overall eating patterns and limit excess refined sugars, such as those in sweets and sugary drinks, rather than eliminating carbohydrates altogether.

Plant-Based Eating: More Plants, Not Perfection

Zavodnik described plant-based eating as an umbrella term centered on increasing fruits, vegetables, whole grains, beans, nuts and seeds. It does not necessarily require becoming vegetarian or vegan.

That approach resonated with Pyle, who said he is now following a Mediterranean-style diet, eating less meat and adding more nuts and legumes. He is also finding ways to make healthier choices practical. “I picked up a kale Caesar bowl from Walmart for lunch yesterday,” he said. “It wasn’t that bad.”

Keto and Fasting Require Individual Guidance

McKee explained that ketogenic diets are high in fat and very low in carbohydrates. While researchers are studying keto diets in cancer care, evidence is still evolving, and the diet can be difficult to follow safely—particularly for people losing weight, struggling with appetite or managing treatment side effects.

To learn more about nutritional approaches that complement cancer treatment, watch the webinar, duke.is/FoodFight, or talk with your healthcare provider about a referral to a registered dietitian.

Keegan will speak again about cancer diets at the annual Genitourinary Community Education Event. Register for this free event at <https://duke.is/GUCommunityEducationEvent>.

dukecancerinstitute.org

Duke Cancer Institute offers a variety of cancer support and survivorship services for patients and their loved ones to assist with navigating life during and after cancer treatment. Our goal is to shape the future of cancer survivorship and improve the quality of life throughout treatment.

Patient and Nurse Navigation

Navigators support patients, families, and caregivers throughout cancer care — from diagnosis to the end of treatment. They provide information to guide decisions, advocate for your needs, identify barriers, and connect you with helpful resources. To learn more, ask your healthcare team about available Navigation services.

Clinical Social Work

Oncology and palliative care social workers help patients and families manage emotional and practical challenges. They ease stress, address financial concerns, and connect you with resources like disability support, home health, hospice, and end-of-life planning. Ask your healthcare team about Clinical Social Work services.

Cancer Nutrition

Our registered dietitians specialize in oncology and help to prevent and treat malnutrition, restore digestive health, and minimize the side effects of your cancer treatment. To learn more, visit duke.is/Onc-Nutrition.

Chaplain Services & Education

Duke chaplains are on site seven days a week to offer spiritual support to you and your loved ones. When requested, they connect you with faith-specific representatives from the community. To learn more, contact Chaplain Services & Education at Duke Cancer Institute locations by visiting dukehealth.org/support-services/pastoral-services.

Therapy and Counseling

Our medical family therapists provide individual, couples, and family therapy. They help you and your loved ones cope with the impact of cancer, all at no cost. Psychiatry and psychology services are also available and offered as part of our treatment for emotional, psychological, and relational issues associated with a cancer diagnosis. To learn more, visit duke.is/c/b47z.

Sexual Health Services

Sexual health services explain the impact cancer treatments can have on sexual health and intimacy. They help you address concerns surrounding sexual function, sexual feelings, intimacy, and changes in sexual health. To learn more, visit duke.is/sexual-health.

Support services are offered both in-person and remotely. Please call 919.684.4497 for more information.

Quit at Duke

Quit at Duke is a program designed to help people quit using tobacco products. Services are provided by tobacco treatment specialists and behavioral medicine clinicians. For more information or to schedule an appointment, please call 919.613.QUIT (7848). To learn more, visit dukehealth.org/quit.

Survivorship Services

We partner with you and your loved ones to support healthy, fulfilling lives beyond cancer. Care includes physical and emotional assessments, screenings, and counseling for prevention and wellness. Learn more at duke.is/survivorshipservices or call 919.668.2122.

Teen and Young Adult Oncology Program

This program supports teens and young adults (ages 15–29) and their loved ones through cancer diagnosis, treatment, and survivorship. Services include specialized medical care, individual and family therapy, peer support, and activity-based groups in both clinical and community settings. Learn more at dukehealth.org/TYAO.

Palliative Care

This team helps manage symptoms like pain, fatigue, nausea, anxiety, and more — improving your comfort and quality of life. They work with you, your loved ones, and your doctors to ensure care aligns with your goals. To schedule, call 919.668.6688 (option #7) or visit dukehealth.org/treatments/palliative-care.

Self-Image Services

Our self-image consultants offer a variety of services and products to assist individuals with changes in body-image experienced during cancer treatment and survivorship. If you are interested in a self-image consultation, at one of our three locations, call 919.613.1906 or email cancersupport@duke.edu. To learn more, visit duke.is/self-image.

Child and Adolescent Life Services

They focus on supporting the emotional and developmental needs of children and teens in families who are facing cancer. They hold individual education sessions to support parents while they take the lead in helping their children understand a cancer diagnosis, treatment, side effects, and changes in their family life. To learn more, visit duke.is/cals.

Onco-Fertility Services

Cancer treatments can impact fertility. If you are interested in a fertility preservation consult, talk to your care team, and a nurse navigator will connect you with specialists — including fertility-trained providers, financial counselors, and therapists, and more. Services are available from diagnosis through survivorship, even if preservation wasn't completed. Call 919-613-4389 to speak with a nurse navigator. To learn more, visit duke.is/fertpreservation.

Do you want to receive this newsletter monthly by email? Scan the QR code to [subscribe](#) today.



Scan to learn more or visit duke.is/n8h92

Pets at Duke

Take a break, find some calm, and connect with a furry friend.

Check the calendar to plan your visit: duke.is/PADCalendar



Support Gatherings

Duke Cancer Patient Support Program's support gatherings are professionally facilitated. Attendees have an opportunity to meet people in a similar situation, share their experience and get support, tips, and ideas from those who understand what they are going through. Registration is required. To learn more, call 919.684.4497. Scan the QR code to register for support groups. All times listed are in Eastern Standard Time.



Art Therapy at Nasher

Wednesday :: August 12

2 to 3:30 p.m.

[Second Wednesday of the month](#)

This [group](#) is open to patients and caregivers and is located at the Nasher Museum of Art in Durham. No art experience is needed. For more information and to register, visit [duke.is/nn4gr](#).

Breast & GYN Cancers Support Group

Tuesday :: August 11

5:30 to 7 p.m.

[Second Tuesday of the month](#)

This [group](#) is for patients only. To register, visit [duke.is/mhc7m](#).

Caregiver Support Group

Thursday :: August 20

6 to 7 p.m.

[Third Thursday of the month](#)

This [group](#) is for caregivers only. To register, visit [duke.is/mhc7m](#).

General Cancer Support Group

Thursday :: August 13, 5 to 6 p.m.

[Typically the Third Thursday of the month](#)

This [group](#) is for patients only. Topics include communicating, finding information, making decisions, solving problems negotiating, and standing up for your rights. To register, visit [duke.is/mhc7m](#).

Head and Neck Cancer Group

Monday :: August 10, 4 to 5 p.m.

[Second Monday of the month](#)

This [group](#) is open to patients and caregivers and is located at Duke Physical Therapy and Sports Medicine in the Center for Living Campus. For more information and to register, visit [duke.is/g/utqh](#).

Kidney and Bladder Cancer Support Group

Wednesday :: August 19

4 to 5:30 p.m.

[Third Wednesday of the month](#)

This [group](#) is for patients and caregivers. To register, visit [duke.is/mhc7m](#).

LGBTQIA+ Cancer Support Group

Wednesday :: August 26

5:30 to 6:30 p.m.

[Fourth Wednesday of the month](#)

This [group](#) is for patients and caregivers. To register, visit [duke.is/mhc7m](#).

Metastatic Cancer Support Group for Women

Wednesday :: August 19

3 to 4:30 p.m.

[Third Wednesday of the month](#)

This [group](#) is for patients only. To register, visit [duke.is/mhc7m](#).

Parenting with Cancer Meetup

Tuesday :: August 18, 7:30 to 8:30 p.m.

[Third Tuesday of the month](#)

This [group](#) is for parents with cancer and their caregivers, who have young children and/or teens. To register, visit [duke.is/mhc7m](#).

Prostate Cancer Support Group

Monday :: August 24, 4 to 6 p.m.

[Fourth Monday of the month](#)

This [group](#) is for patients and caregivers. To register, visit [duke.is/mhc7m](#).

KidsCAN!

KidsCAN! is a supportive program for children and teens, ages 4 to 18, who have a parent or significant caregiver living with a diagnosis of cancer. Monthly meetups focus on issues such as understanding cancer, changes in the family life, feelings, self-care, memories, cooperation, love and family. **KidsCAN!** for children ages 4 through 5th grade typically meets virtually on the second Monday of each month. **KidsCAN!** Middle School for youth in grades 6–8 typically meets virtually on the third Monday of each month. Please note that both groups take a break during the month of August. In addition to virtual sessions, **KidsCAN!** offers quarterly in-person meetups for participants and families.



Registration is required. To learn more and to register, visit [duke.is/m/wv4y](#).

TYAO

Teen and Young Adult Oncology Program

Join us for a virtual meetup for young adults (18-39 years old) on Tuesday, August 25th from 6:30 – 7:30 p.m. Email TYAO@Duke.edu for more information and to register. Check out our Instagram for updates and upcoming events.



@duketyao

Rest, Relax, Renew

The Duke Cancer Patient Support Program provides services and resources to help support patients and their loved ones. For a list of complimentary services, visit dukehealth.org/cancersupport or call 919.684.4497.



Virtual Tai Chi Returning September 11 and 25 2:30 to 3:15 p.m.

Join Dr. Jay Dunbar, founder and director of The Magic Tortoise Taijiquan School, for a virtual [Tai Chi class](#) for cancer patients and survivors. Visit duke.is/8mues to learn more and to register.

Virtual Yoga
Tuesdays :: August 11 & 25, Noon to 1 p.m.
Second and Fourth Tuesday Join certified Yoga for Cancer instructor Laura Woodall in a [class](#) designed specifically for cancer patients and survivors. Visit duke.is/7jgt3 to learn more and to register.

Mind-Body Approaches to Coping with Cancer
Tuesdays :: August 4 & 18, Noon to 1 p.m.
First and Third Tuesday of the month
Mindfulness can be a powerful tool to manage the stress that can accompany living with and life after cancer. These [virtual sessions](#) teach mind and body approaches to coping with cancer. Through the focus on the breath and the present moment, patients and their caregivers will learn to discover how to respond rather than react

to life's stressors. For more information and to register, visit duke.is/gzsvt.

Explore the Power of Your Voice for Healing

Wednesdays :: August 5 & 19, Noon to 1 p.m.

First and Third Wednesday of the month
In this virtual [workshop](#) you will explore breathing techniques, vocal toning, and chanting. These tools and techniques, when used daily, encourage mindful attention to one's heart and voice. Experience the health benefits of sound, vibration, and self-expression. Visit duke.is/mn7m9 to learn more and to register.

Exercise Consultations

Mondays :: 2 to 4 p.m.
Wednesdays :: 8:30 to 11:30 a.m.

Supportive Care & Survivorship Center offers [exercise consultations](#) by exercise physiologists. These personalized sessions

are available to oncology patients and survivors at no cost. Video chat or phone sessions are available on Mondays between 2:00 and 4:00 p.m. and Wednesdays between 8:30 and 11:30 a.m. To learn more or to register email DHFCancerExercise@dm.duke.edu or visit duke.is/82cne.

Salon Services

Wednesday :: August 19
Monday :: August 24
10 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Third Wednesday and fourth Monday of the month
Our volunteer team of expert hair stylists provide private consultations at the Belk Boutique in Durham at no cost. They offer dry cuts for your hair or a head shave. Our stylists can also assist with wig styling, cutting, and general wig care. To learn more, visit duke.is/n/8mu6.



Helping cancer survivors live a healthy, full life while navigating their unique needs.

Cancer Survivorship Services



Learn more or schedule a visit:

919.668.2122 or [Cancer Survivorship Services](#)



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Duke Cancer Institute Support and Activity Groups

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For more information and to register, visit
dukehealth.org/cancersupport or call 919.684.4497

To make a gift to support our no charge services, visit
gifts.duke.edu/cancersupport