

Snack attack: Eating unhealthy snack foods may affect cancer risk in patients with Lynch syndrome

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A new analysis has found that loading up on snack foods may increase cancer risk in individuals with an inborn susceptibility to colorectal and other cancers. Published early online in *CANCER*, a peer-reviewed journal of the American Cancer Society, the study suggests that an eating pattern low in snack foods could help these individuals—who have a condition called Lynch syndrome—lower their risk.

Lynch syndrome is an inherited condition characterized by a high risk of developing colorectal cancer, endometrial cancer, and other cancers at an early age. The syndrome is caused by mutations in genes involved with repairing DNA within cells.

Numerous studies have investigated associations between certain foods and colorectal cancer, and now there is general agreement that red and processed meats and [alcohol consumption](#) can increase individuals' risk. Only a few studies have evaluated [lifestyle factors](#) and colorectal cancer in patients with Lynch syndrome, though. To investigate, Akke Botma, PhD, MSc, of the Wageningen University in the Netherlands, and her colleagues collected dietary information from 486 individuals with Lynch syndrome. During an average follow-up of 20 months, colorectal polyps ([precancerous lesions](#)) were detected in 58 people in the study.

"We saw that Lynch syndrome patients who had an eating pattern with higher intakes of snack foods—like fast food snacks, chips, or fried snacks—were twice as likely to develop these polyps as Lynch syndrome patients having a pattern with lower intakes of snack foods," said Dr. Botma.

The findings suggest that certain dietary patterns

have an influence on the development of polyps in individuals with Lynch syndrome. "Unfortunately, this does not mean that eating a diet low in snack foods will prevent any polyps from developing, but it might mean that those Lynch syndrome patients who eat a lot of snack foods might have more polyps than if they ate less [snack foods](#)," said Dr. Botma. Because the study is observational, other studies are needed to confirm the results.

Previous work from the group revealed that smoking and obesity may also increase the risk of developing colorectal polyps among individuals with Lynch Syndrome. Thus, even though they may have inherited a very high risk of developing cancer, it may be possible to affect this risk by adopting a healthy lifestyle, including a healthy diet.

More information: "Dietary patterns and colorectal adenomas in Lynch Syndrome - the GEO Lynch cohort study." Akke Botma, Hans F.A. Vasen, Fränzel J.B. van Duijnhoven, Jan H. Kleibeuker, Fokko M. Nagengast, and Ellen Kampman. *CANCER*; Published Online: December 17, 2012 ([DOI: 10.1002/cncr.27726](https://doi.org/10.1002/cncr.27726)).

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