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Do cancer patients change their diet in the e-health information era? A review of the literature and a survey as a proposal for the Italian population

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Abstract

In recent years, there has been an explosion in the amount of available information on cancer in parallel with an ever-increasing number of cancer survivors. Cancer patients and long-term survivors are known to be more sensitive to health-related information and dietary changes could represent a potential consequence of this huge availability of messages. In our review about dietary changes after cancer diagnosis, we found that this topic is particularly investigated among the breast cancer population. The literature examined show that breast cancer patients modify their eating habits after diagnosis in a percentage that varies between approximately 30% and 60%. The most reported changes were an increased consumption of fruit and vegetables, a decrease in the consumption of red meat, fats and sugary foods. Patients who reported changes were more likely to be younger, with higher educational levels and with a longer period of time since their diagnosis of cancer. It also emerged that cancer patients are often more likely to use supplements. This topic has not been investigated in cancer patients in Italy, therefore, we propose an approach to explore it with a structured questionnaire: The "ECHO SURVEY - Eating habits CHanges in Oncologic patients".

Keywords: Cancer patients; Cancer survivors; Dietary changes; Eating habits survey; Food habits; Health information; Nutrition education.