

Collard Greens, Community, and Breast Health

By DeBorrah Carter | Sassy Survivor Breast Health Alliance



For many of us, Sunday dinner is more than a meal. A pot of collard greens or mustard greens, a serving of cabbage, and a table full of family carry stories, comfort, and tradition. Those familiar vegetables also give us a meaningful way to talk about nourishing our bodies and breast health.

In 2010, researchers from the Black Women's Health Study published an analysis of diet and breast cancer among more than 51,000 Black women. They found that women who reported eating more vegetables had a lower observed rate of **estrogen receptor-negative breast cancer** than women who ate fewer vegetables. This type of breast cancer does not use estrogen to grow, and it can be more challenging to treat. The finding deserves our attention because Black women were at the center of the research. [1]

The study also looked at cruciferous vegetables—a family that includes collard greens, mustard greens, cabbage, and broccoli. Higher intake of that vegetable group showed a possible association with lower **overall** breast cancer risk. The researchers saw a similar signal for carrots. Those findings about specific vegetables were less certain than the finding about overall vegetable intake and estrogen receptor-negative disease. The study did not show that one type of green is better than another, or that a serving of vegetables prevents cancer. [1]

That uncertainty does not take away a positive message: **let's make room for more vegetables on our plates.** We do not need to abandon the foods we grew up with to care for our health. Collards and mustard greens can be part of Sunday dinner and a weekday lunch. Cabbage can be roasted, sautéed, or added to soup. Broccoli and carrots can join the table, too. Fresh, frozen, or otherwise accessible choices can help us build variety into meals that fit our lives.

I want us to welcome this research with both hope and honesty. The National Cancer Institute tells us that studies have not yet shown for certain that collards, mustard greens, cabbage, or broccoli can prevent breast cancer. [2] But these vegetables bring nutrients and fiber to our tables, and eating a variety of them is a caring choice we can make for ourselves and our families. As we share meals and look after one another, let's also keep the conversation going about our personal risk, screening, and any breast changes we notice. Our health deserves that kind of attention and care.

So when the greens come around the table, take a helping if you like them. Let's pass along our recipes and our health conversations together. Our traditions can be a doorway to caring for ourselves and one another—one meal, one question, and one informed decision at a time.

Sources

1. Boggs DA, et al. "Fruit and Vegetable Intake in Relation to Risk of Breast Cancer in the Black Women's Health Study." *American Journal of Epidemiology* (2010). <https://doi.org/10.1093/aje/kwq293>. Study summary: <https://www.bu.edu/bwhs/research/publications/2010-2/>
2. National Cancer Institute. "Cruciferous Vegetables and Cancer Prevention." <https://www.cancer.gov/about-cancer/causes-prevention/risk/diet/cruciferous-vegetables-fact-sheet>