

6 WAYS TO LOWER YOUR CANCER RISK

by Kohila Govindaraju, freelance nutritionist

It appears that at least one-third of all adult cancer cases are linked to lifestyle, and that's a good thing because it means that some things are still within your control. If you are concerned about your risk of cancer, take comfort that some simple lifestyle changes can make a big difference. Every healthy choice you make cuts down your cancer risk. Here are six habits you can develop to lower your risk of cancer.

Don't wait till you are overweight

A BMI of 25 or less is optimal. Waist size should also be considered, because a higher amount of body fat deposited in and around the waist signifies a higher risk of cancer. Having too much belly fat is linked to an increased risk of colorectal, pancreas, endometrium (lining of the uterus) and breast cancer (in women past menopause). A higher intake of dietary fat and alcohol and low levels of exercise have been implicated in causing prostate cancer in men and in estrogen metabolism which is related to an increased risk of breast cancer in women!

If you are overweight or obese, work to lose weight. Excess body fat can be reduced by lowering the number of calories you consume (reducing portion size), choosing a low-fat diet, and increasing the physical activity.

Regular physical activity

Regular physical activity will help reduce your risk of cancer and recurrence through several powerful and synergistic mechanisms. Strive for at least 30 minutes of moderate aerobic exercise. Combining aerobic and resistance exercise will have a synergistic effect on glycaemic control in individuals with type 2 diabetes. Enjoy performing some light stretching exercises often. About 25% of all breast cancer cases in women could have been avoided by maintaining a healthy body weight.

Wine down

Alcohol is a known cause of mouth, throat, liver, colon and rectum cancers. People who drink alcohol should limit their intake to no more than a glass per day.

4

What's on your plate?

Healthy selections at the supermarket and at meal times will help reduce your cancer risk.

Fruits, vegetables, wholegrains and pulses are generally low in calories and fat. They are considered the good food choices that help you control your weight and reduce your cancer risk. They are rich in

- vitamins and minerals that strengthen the immune system.
- antioxidants that help to prevent the cell damage that leads to cancer.
- fibre, that is linked to reducing the cancer risk.

Eating lots of vegetables, especially cooked tomato-based foods, rich in lycopene, can lower the risk of prostate cancer in men. Watermelon, grapefruit, red and pink guava are also good sources of lycopene.

Berries are high in antioxidant properties. Antioxidants neutralise the free radicals, unstable compounds that damage the cells and lead to diseases including cancer.

Eating a diet high in fibre can reduce the risk of colorectal cancer. Dietary fibre protects against breast cancer through

inhibition of the intestinal reabsorption of estrogen.

Soluble fibre has been shown to be more effective in controlling the blood glucose, insulin, which have been positively related to the risk of breast cancer. Insoluble fibre is more effective in binding and excreting estrogen with a consequent decrease in serum estrogen.

Nut eaters are less likely to die of cancer, it seems. The unsaturated fatty acids, minerals and other nutrients from heart-healthy peanuts, almonds and pistachios are not only cardio-protective, but also anti-carcinogenic, anti-inflammatory and with antioxidant properties that aid in lowering the cholesterol, inflammation and reducing the risk of cancer. Nuts are good sources of selenium which helps to destroy cancer cells and aid cells repair their DNA.

Choose wholegrain, as refined foods are high in the glycaemic index (GI). Research has shown that even women with BMI < 25 had an increased risk of breast cancer with an increasing amount of rapidly absorbed carbohydrates.

Limit your consumption of processed meats — smoked, cured, salted, added with preservatives — because a diet that high in processed meat is linked to bowel cancer.

Culinary herbs such as garlic, basil, oregano, cilantro (coriander leaves), chives and parsley not only add flavour and colour to meals, but also help to prevent and manage heart disease, cancer and diabetes.

Choose cooking methods such as baking, boiling, steaming or stir frying, for they limit the use of fat and reduce your risk of being overweight! Broccoli is a good source of cancer-protective flavonoids. Steam or stir fry this vegetable to hold the cancer preventing flavonoids!



Cover up

Many skin cancers are caused by excess exposure to ultra-violet (UV) rays from the sun or other sources. Stay out of the sun between 10 am and 4 pm, when the sun rays are strongest. Avoid tanning beds, for these are just as damaging as UV rays.

Be Smoke-Free

Cigarette smoking accounts for at least 30% of all cancer deaths. It has been linked to various types of cancer, including the cancer of the lung, bladder, cervix and kidney. Lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer death in both men and women. Do note that exposure to second hand and sidestream smoke can also increase the risk of lung cancer. So, provide a safe, enjoyable and accessible environments for yourself and your family.

References

Yikyung Park, Louise A Brinton, Amy F Subar, Albert Hollenbeck, and Arthur Schatzkin. Dietary fiber intake and risk of breast cancer in postmenopausal women: the National Institutes of Health–AARP Diet and Health Study. *Am J Clin Nutr* September 2009 vol. 90 no. 3 664-671
 Wangqing Wen, Xiao Ou Shu, Honglan Li, Gong Yang, Bu-Tian Ji, Hui Cai, Yu-Tang Gao, and Wei Zheng. Dietary carbohydrates, fiber, and breast cancer risk in Chinese women. *Am J Clin Nutr* January 2009 vol. 89 no. 1 283-289
 Martin Lajous, Marie-Christine Bourton-Ruault, Alban Fabre, Françoise Clavel-Chapelon, and Isabelle Romieu. Carbohydrate intake, glycemic index, glycemic load, and risk of postmenopausal breast cancer in a prospective study of French women. *Am J Clin Nutr* May 2008 vol. 87 no. 5 1384-1391
 Ernest H Rosenbaum, M.D. David Spiegel, M.D. Patricia Fobair, L.C.S.W., M.P.H. Hollyl Gautier, R.N. With Louise Maffitt, B.F.A. *Everyone's Guide to Cancer Survivorship: A Road Map for Better Health*. 2007
www.cancer.ie
www.aicr.org