



Ten Tips to Reduce Your Risk of Cancer

In 2008, an estimated 1.5 million people in the United States were diagnosed with cancer, including over 700,000 new cases in men and nearly the same number of new cases in women. There were also over 650,000 cancer deaths last year, which ranks cancer second only to heart disease as a leading cause of death

Cancer is caused by changes in genes that control the growth and death of cells. The disease develops when cells continue to grow and divide instead of dying off when they get older as they would normally do. As cancer cells multiply, they can damage nearby tissues and can also spread to other parts of the body and develop into new tumors. While improvements in detection, diagnosis, and treatment have increased the survival rate for many types of cancer, we also encourage doing all you can do to prevent the disease as a core strategy of your prescription for optimal health.

With prevention in mind, here are 10 things we can all do to reduce the risk of developing cancer:

1. Avoid tobacco products and second-hand smoke

Lung cancer is the leading cause of cancer deaths in the United States for both men and women. Ironically, it's also the most preventable type of cancer. Some 87-percent of lung cancer deaths are attributable to exposure to tobacco smoke including roughly 3,000 deaths each year in non-smokers due to second-hand smoke. Of the 45 million Americans who still smoke in 2007, 30-percent of male and 21-percent of female high school students reported using some form of tobacco in the prior month. If you smoke, take the necessary steps to quit for the health of you and your loved ones.

2. Achieve and maintain a healthy weight

Being overweight increases your chance of developing certain types of cancer, including cancer of the esophagus, colon and rectum, and pancreas. Obesity also increases the risk of breast cancer in postmenopausal women by roughly 50-percent, and endometrial cancer by about three fold. And carrying too much extra body weight is believed to account for up to 30-percent of kidney cancers in both men and women. Make smart food choices, control portion sizes, and fill up on fruits and vegetables to help manage your healthy weight and reduce your risk of cancer.

3. Get moving

The American Cancer Society recommends regular exercise as a way to prevent cancer. Regular exercise burns calories and can help you reach and maintain a healthy weight. Pick something that gets and keeps you moving like walking, hiking, cycling, swimming, team sports, and even dancing. Consider biking or walking to work, or take a walk during your lunch break. Be sure to gradually work up to 30-45 minutes of exercise a day for five or more days per week.

4. Eat more fruits, vegetables, and whole grains

Fruits and vegetables are naturally rich in dietary antioxidants like vitamin C, vitamin E, and a whole family of carotenoids that may help to protect your healthy genes from oxidative damage. Recent research suggests that eating tomatoes may help to protect against developing prostate cancer, while eating cruciferous vegetables like broccoli, cauliflower, and brussels sprouts may help to protect against bladder cancer. Fruits and vegetables are also rich in fiber which can speed the transit of food through the digestive system and may reduce the absorption of cancer-causing chemicals. So eating a wide variety of fruits and vegetables may be the best way to ensure broad spectrum protection.

5. Fresh is best

Until about 20 years ago, stomach cancer was the most common cancer worldwide, perhaps due to cultural preferences for eating large amounts of salt-preserved foods such as cured meats and pickled vegetables. This finding underscores the point that when it comes to eating most foods, it's generally best to eat fresh rather than salted, cured, or pickled. In general, the less processed the food, the healthier it will be for you.

6. Limit alcohol intake

Excess alcohol consumption is associated with increased risks of cancers of the oral cavity, throat, voice box, esophagus, liver, breast, and possibly the colon and rectum. Breast cancer is the most common form of cancer diagnosed in women, and aside from carrying too much body weight, alcohol intake is the only other established risk factor for this disease. It's recommended that men who drink alcohol should limit their intake to no more than 2 drinks per day, while women should limit their intake to no more than 1 drink daily.

7. Practice sun safety and check for changes in your skin

Ultraviolet radiation from the sun is damaging to your skin. The genetic damage it can cause to skin cells can lead to skin cancer, a disease that is increasingly common, especially among young people. Be aware that the sun's peak time is between 10 am and 3 pm and that sunlight exposure can be intensified by up to 50-percent when reflected from sand, water, snow, ice, and concrete. When outdoors, cover up exposed areas and wear sun screen with an SPF of 15 or more. Know your skin and be aware of the location, size, and shape of moles and skin spots, and report any changes promptly to your physician.

8. Reduce your exposure to potential carcinogens

There are many substances in the environment with the potential to put you at higher risk for developing cancer. On the job, minimize your exposure to fumes, dust, solvents, and chemicals. Try to reduce your everyday exposure to potentially-toxic environmental chemicals in the home and...

- Dust and vacuum regularly to rid your home of toxins attracted to dust
- Open windows and use fresh air to freshen and minimize indoor pollution
- Filter your drinking water to remove pollutants
- Switch to green cleaning products that are safe but still powerful

9. Know your family history and get screened

Some 5-10-percent of cancers are due to a genetic predisposition to cancer. Family history is a risk factor for common types of cancer including breast, ovarian, colon, and prostate cancer. If you have a family history of cancer your physician may recommend genetic testing to see if you have the type of gene that can increase your chance of developing cancer. For individuals with an average risk of cancer, the following cancer screening guidelines are recommended:

- Breast cancer: Women should begin yearly mammograms at age 40 and conduct regular breast self exams starting in the 20's.
- Colon and rectal cancer: Men and women should have one or more screening tests including a colonoscopy starting at age 50.
- Cervical cancer: All women should begin cervical cancer screening no later than 21 years of age.
- Prostate cancer: Men should have the prostate-specific antigen (PSA) blood test and digital rectal examination annually beginning at age 50.

10. Choose your dietary supplements wisely

Whether it's vitamin D, folic acid, calcium, the antioxidants like vitamin C, vitamin E, and the carotenoids, fiber, or emerging phytochemicals, nutrition surveys have made it clear that your diet is unlikely to be providing all the essential nutrients and other dietary factors you need to be at your healthiest. And dietary supplement studies have yielded compelling evidence that supplements can help to reduce the chance of developing cancer in undernourished individuals.

Researchers at the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center and the University of Washington published a study in *Nutrition and Cancer*¹ that evaluated the association between dietary and supplemental zinc and prostate cancer in 35,242 men participating in the VITAL cohort, a study specifically designed to evaluate the impact of dietary supplements on cancer risk. In this study, long-term supplemental zinc intake was in fact associated with reduced risk of clinically relevant advanced disease.

And as reported in the *Archives of Internal Medicine*², National Cancer Institute researchers found that among postmenopausal women, the greater their total calcium intake from dietary supplements and food up to about 1,300 mg per day, the lower was their risk of developing cancer. For men and women, a diet rich in calcium from supplements and food was associated with a lower risk of developing cancers of the digestive system such as colon cancer. These findings are consistent with randomized clinical trials which have shown that calcium supplementation reduces the recurrence of colon polyps, which are precursors to colon cancer

Clearly, dietary supplements play a key role in making up the nutrient shortfalls in your diet, and they provide a means of achieving optimal nutrient levels needed to achieve and maintain the best of health.

¹[Zinc intake from supplements and diet and prostate cancer](#). Gonzalez A, Peters U, Lampe JW, White E. *Nutr Cancer*. 2009;61(2):206-15

²[Dairy food, calcium, and risk of cancer in the NIH-AARP Diet and Health Study](#). Park Y, Leitzmann MF, Subar AF, Hollenbeck A, Schatzkin A. *Arch Intern Med*. 2009;169(4):391-401