

Making Lifestyle Choices to Help Prevent Some Common Cancers

Choices we make in our daily lives may lower or increase the risk of several common cancers, including lung, colon/rectal, breast, prostate and skin cancers. After heart disease, cancer in all its forms is the No. 2 cause of death in the U.S. The cumulative evidence of more than 40 years of scientific research suggests adopting these four daily practices may help you prevent these cancers.*

1. **Eat a healthful diet, emphasizing fruits, vegetables, fiber and healthful fats.** Eating a balanced diet rich in fruits, vegetables, fiber and healthy fats such as omega 3s may lower the risk of colon/rectal, breast and prostate cancers. Antioxidants may be a key factor in this protective function. Eating less red meat may lower risk of colon/rectal cancer. Lower saturated fat intake may reduce risk and recurrence of breast cancer. Diets rich in dairy and calcium have been associated with lower risk of colon cancer and of death in breast cancer in women but with higher risk of prostate cancer in men.

2. **Get regular physical activity.** Thirty to 60 minutes of moderate activity/exercise three to seven days a week has been associated with lower risk of lung, colon/rectal and breast cancers. Regular activity also helps manage weight; being overweight may play a role in some cancer risks.
3. **Don't smoke.** Lung cancer is No. 1 in U.S. cancer deaths. Approximately 85–90 percent of lung cancers are related to tobacco use. Tobacco smoke may trigger genetic susceptibility to lung cancers in many people. Stopping smoking lowers risk by 50 percent. A diet rich in fruits and vegetables and regular physical activity are also associated with lower lung cancer risk. Stopping smoking may also improve the effectiveness of cancer treatment.
4. **Use sunscreen and avoid sunburn.** One in five Americans will develop skin cancer during their lifetime; 1 in 33 will develop melanoma, the most dangerous form of skin cancer. Ultraviolet (UV) radiation, both UVB and UVA, can damage skin cells and lead to cancer. Overexposure to UV radiation from artificial sources (e.g., tanning beds) is equally dangerous. Wearing sunscreen, protective clothing and avoiding midday sun exposure can help. Frequency of sunburns is particularly related to increased risk of melanoma.

* This information is based on a review by physicians who are oncology specialists at M. D. Anderson Cancer Center Orlando: Brown CH, Baidas SM, Hajdenberg JJ, Kayaleh OR, Pennock GK, Shah NC and Tseng JE. Lifestyle Interventions in the Prevention and Treatment of Cancer. American Journal of Lifestyle Medicine, Sept/Oct 2009.



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