

FOOD AND LIFESTYLE- WHAT CAN YOU DO TO REDUCE CANCER RISK?

Each year, more than 608,500 Americans die of cancer; about 42% of these deaths are linked to lifestyle, including poor diet, physical inactivity and carrying too much weight, according to the American Cancer Society. Here are some of the most important things you can do to reduce your cancer risk:

Cancer-fighting Foods

No one food can prevent cancer, however, eating an antioxidant-rich diet rich filled with vegetables, fruits, and whole grains can provide plenty of protective compounds that can decrease risk of cancer, as well as other chronic diseases like type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and stroke. Here are some cancer-fighting superstars to add to your plate:

Cruciferous Vegetables

Aside from containing cancer-fighting compounds like fiber and antioxidants, members of the cruciferous family of vegetables also contain sulforaphane, isothiocyanate, and indoles – compounds that stimulate the release of enzymes that break down cancer-causing chemicals in the liver. They are especially helpful in reducing risk of hormonal cancers, such as breast cancer. Cruciferous vegetables include broccoli, cabbage, Brussels sprouts, cauliflower, kale, bok choy, and Swiss chard.

Citrus Fruits

More than 170 different phytonutrients have been identified in citrus fruits, including limonoids, monoterpenes, flavonoids, and carotenoids. A diet high in citrus fruits has been associated with a 40 to 50 percent reduction in cancers of the esophagus, larynx, mouth, and stomach, according to Australian research. Enjoy oranges, tangerines, clementines, grapefruit, limes, and lemons (enjoy the zest, too!).

Flaxseed

This tiny, shiny, brown seed provides lignans and omega-3 fats, which may lower hormone levels and slow tumor growth. To reap all of flaxseed's nutritional benefits, choose ground flaxseed over whole. Flax oil lacks the fiber and lignans believed to possess cancer-fighting properties. Sprinkle flaxseed meal on cereal, yogurt, and add to baked goods.

Legumes

Lentils, beans, and split peas are all members of the legume family and are a great source of plant-based protein. They're also a good source of folate, a B vitamin that guards against cellular DNA damage. Aim for three or four servings each week. Try adding them to salads, soups, pilafs, and casseroles.

Cooked Tomatoes

Tomatoes and tomato products are rich sources of the powerful antioxidant, lycopene. Eating food rich in lycopene has been linked to lower rates of cancer and heart disease. Canned tomatoes and tomato products like salsa, paste, sauce, soup, and juice are the best sources of lycopene because heat breaks down plant cell walls, which allows the release of additional lycopene. Include salsa as a dip for veggies, pack a can of low-sodium vegetable juice for lunch and add diced canned tomatoes to casseroles, soups, and chili.

Eat the Rainbow

Different colored fruits and vegetables offer up their own set of disease fighting health benefits. Red fruits and vegetables, such as strawberries, tomatoes, watermelon, and beets are rich in the antioxidants lycopene and anthocyanins. Most orange and yellow produce, such as carrots and squash are rich in beta-carotene. Green veggies offer up the phytonutrients lutein and zeaxanthin. Blue and purple fruits and vegetables contain anthocyanins, flavonoids, and ellagic acid, compounds that may destroy and fight cancer cells. Be sure to keep your plate as colorful as possible.

Turn Down the Temperature

When muscle meat from beef, pork, poultry, and fish are cooked at high temperatures, typically used during flame grilling and pan frying, toxic compounds called heterocyclic amines (HCAs) and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) are formed. Laboratory studies have shown that these substances cause changes in DNA and may increase cancer risk. Here's what you can do to reduce exposure to potentially dangerous toxins:

- Marinate meat, poultry and fish in antioxidant-containing seasonings and herbs like crushed garlic, rosemary, sage, and citrus juices for at least an hour before cooking.
- Trim fat prior to cooking to reduce flare-ups at the grill; smoke may contain hazardous toxins.
- Avoid overcooking or charring meats.
- Flip meat frequently to speed cooking time and prevent HCAs from forming.
- Choose thinner, smaller cuts of meat which require less cooking time.
- Consider pre-cooking using slow, moist, low-heat methods like the microwave, or simmer or braise on the stovetop, then finish on the grill.
- Grilled vegetables and fruits pose little risk of forming carcinogenic compounds, according to researchers.

Get Moving!

Exercise can lower levels of substances like insulin and insulin-like growth factor, both known to drive cancer cell growth. Physical activity can also reduce inflammation and help with weight loss and weight management. The 2020-2025 Dietary Guidelines for Americans recommends at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity each week. Find activities you enjoy and build exercise into your day, such as taking the stairs, parking your car further away from entrances and walking whenever possible.

Reach and Maintain a Healthy Waist and Weight

Excess weight and fat tissue cause the body to produce more hormones that are linked with tumor growth, including estrogen and insulin, a hormone which can stimulate cancer growth. Obesity may also cause low-level inflammation in the body, which over time can cause DNA damage that leads to cancer. Fat around the waist – resulting in “apple-shaped” body types has been found to be particularly dangerous to health.

To reduce cancer risk and keep your weight in the healthy range, try to keep your BMI below 25. Go to https://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/educational/lose_wt/BMI/bmicalc.htm to calculate your body mass index and assess your risk.

Sources:

- <https://www.cancer.org/research/cancer-facts-statistics/all-cancer-facts-figures/cancer-facts-figures-2021.html>
- <https://www.cancer.org/latest-news/more-than-4-in-10-cancers-and-cancer-deaths-linked-to-modifiable-risk-factors.html>
- <https://www.cancer.gov/about-cancer/causes-prevention/risk/diet/cruciferous-vegetables-fact-sheet#q3>
- <https://www.cancer.gov/about-cancer/causes-prevention/risk/obesity/physical-activity-fact-sheet>