

After your cancer treatment

A guide for eating well and being active

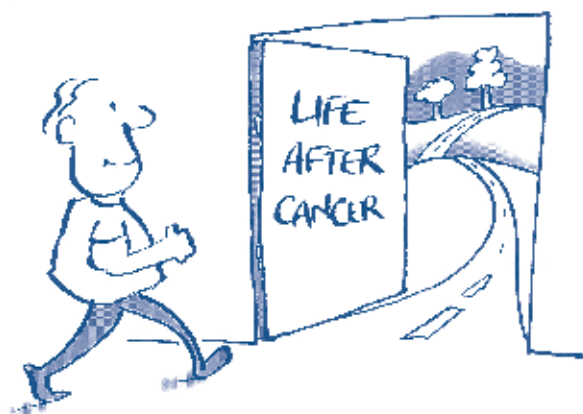


An information sheet for people who have survived cancer, their families and friends.

This information sheet contains advice about healthy eating and physical activity for people who have recovered from cancer.

This information is not suitable for people who are undergoing active treatment or receiving palliative care as their needs would be different. If you are looking for nutrition advice during cancer treatment, call the Cancer Council Helpline on 13 11 20 for a copy of the free booklet, *Food and Cancer*.

Now that my treatment is finished, I want to make sure I'm taking the best possible care of myself.



Life after cancer

Surviving a diagnosis of cancer can change the way you look at life. Some people who have recovered from cancer alter their lifestyle quite dramatically and others return to their normal, regular routines. Whichever path you choose, eating well and being active can help you feel better, have more energy and help reduce the risk of cancer returning.

Studies on people who have survived cancer are limited compared to studies into preventing cancer. The evidence varies for different cancers but research does suggest that a healthy lifestyle can actually stop or slow the development of many cancers (in combination with conventional treatment). While more research needs to be done, the same dietary guidelines recommended for cancer prevention may also help reduce the risk of cancer recurring or secondary cancer.

Healthy habits that include eating more vegetables, fruits, wholegrain breads and cereals, together with regular physical activity, may help to lower the chances of some cancers returning, though these are no guarantee that cancer will not return. Eating well and keeping active may also help protect against heart disease and diabetes.

Recurrence is when the cancer comes back in the same part of the body. Secondary cancer is when the cancer spreads to another part of the body.

Help

Hope

Tips for living well

The lifestyle advice for people who have recovered from cancer is similar to healthy eating and physical activity recommendations for other people:

- maintain a healthy body weight
- be physically active
- eat more vegetables and fruit
- limit or avoid alcohol
- handle and prepare food safely
- don't smoke.

Maintain a healthy body weight

A healthy body weight may reduce the risk of kidney, endometrial, bowel and breast cancers. Maintaining a healthy body weight is especially important for improving survival for women with breast cancer.

The Body Mass Index (BMI) is used to estimate your total amount of body fat.

You can work out your BMI by dividing your weight in kilograms by your height in metres squared.

$$\text{BMI} = \frac{\text{weight}}{(\text{height} \times \text{height})}$$

For example, if you weigh 90 kg and are 170 cm tall, divide 90 by (1.7 x 1.7)

$$\frac{90}{(1.7 \times 1.7)} = \frac{90}{2.89} = 31$$

| | |
|---------------|----------------------|
| BMI < 18.5 | underweight |
| BMI = 18.5-25 | healthy weight range |
| BMI = 25-30 | overweight |
| BMI > 30 | obese |

If you lost a lot of weight during your cancer treatment, you may have to regain some of the lost weight to get back into the healthy weight range.

For ideas on how to gain weight call 13 11 20 for a copy of *Food and Cancer* or download it from www.cancercouncil.com.au.

Tips for managing your weight

To manage your weight, you need to follow a healthy eating pattern and be physically active. Making fruit, vegetables, cereals and other low-fat foods the basis of your diet will help you achieve a healthy body weight.

- Choose lean cuts of meat and trim as much fat as possible before cooking. Remove the skin from chicken.
- Cook food in ways that use less fat – grill, steam or poach.
- Try the low-fat varieties of dairy foods (e.g. low fat milk, yoghurt, cheese).
- Use only a scrape of margarine or butter.
- Reduce the number of high fat takeaways that you eat.
- Avoid snacks which are high in fat, such as crisps and biscuits.
- Reduce your portion sizes.

Dietitians can help

Dietitians can help you with any nutrition concerns. They are available in all public hospitals and some private hospitals. Community health centres often have a dietitian. Ask at your local centre.

Cancer patients are eligible for a Medicare rebate for a consultation with an accredited practising dietitian under the Enhanced Primary Care (EPC) plan if a General Practitioner has referred them. Some private health insurers provide a rebate.

The Dietitians Association of Australia can direct you to an accredited practising dietitian in your area or to one who has experience in particular problems. Go to its website at www.daa.asn.au or call 1800 812 942. Dietitians in private practice are listed in the *Yellow Pages*.

Be physically active

Physical activity helps to protect against bowel and breast cancer. There are many benefits to being active besides the possible protection from the cancer coming back (recurrence). Exercise can also boost your energy levels, decrease fatigue, increase strength, relieve stress, reduce heart disease and lower anxiety and depression.

If you are unsure about whether you are well enough to exercise or if it will interfere with your recovery, talk to your doctor first.

Physical activity should be started slowly and increased gradually. Each person recovering from cancer is different and the amount and type of activities will vary.

Ideas to be as active as you can

- Walking is great exercise. You do not have to join a gym to be more active.
- Walk with a friend or join a walking group.
- Take a dancing class.
- Do some simple stretching exercises while watching television.
- Take the stairs, not the lift.
- Get off the bus/train one stop earlier and walk the rest of the way.
- Park further away from your destination and walk the rest of the way.
- Do vigorous housework like vacuuming or mowing the lawn.
- Get out and do some gardening.
- Take the children or the grandchildren to the park.

I got back into my swimming as soon as I could. The exercise made me feel good about myself.

Eat more vegetables and fruit

Vegetables and fruit contain vitamins, minerals and phytochemicals (pronounced “fight-chemicals”). Phytochemicals are natural substances such as antioxidants that can destroy cancer causing agents (carcinogens). Vegetables and fruit are also high in fibre and low in fat, which help to control your weight. Aim to eat a variety of different coloured vegetables and fruits to ensure you get enough of the substances in plant foods that protect against certain types of cancer.

Cancer Council NSW recommends five serves of vegetables and two serves of fruit a day.

A standard serve of fruit is equal to:

- 1 medium sized fruit e.g. apple, pear or orange
- 2 smaller fruits e.g. plums, apricots or kiwi fruit
- 1 cup of fruit pieces
- ½ cup of fruit juice
- 1½ tablespoons of sultanas.

A standard serve of vegetables is equal to:

- ½ cup of cooked vegetables
- 1 cup of salad.

How to eat more vegetables and fruit everyday

- Enjoy fruit as a snack or for dessert.
- Add fresh or canned fruit as a topping on breakfast cereal.
- Fill half your dinner plate with vegetables.
- Include at least three different coloured vegetables with your main meal.
- Keep it interesting – cook vegetables in different ways e.g. oven roasted, grilled or barbecued.
- Include salad with lunch.
- Shop for fresh vegetables and fruit weekly to ensure you have a fresh supply available.
- Use frozen, dried or canned vegetables and fruit if fresh are not on hand.
- Adapt your recipes to include more vegetables e.g. add carrot, celery and peas to Bolognese sauce.

The basic daily food plan

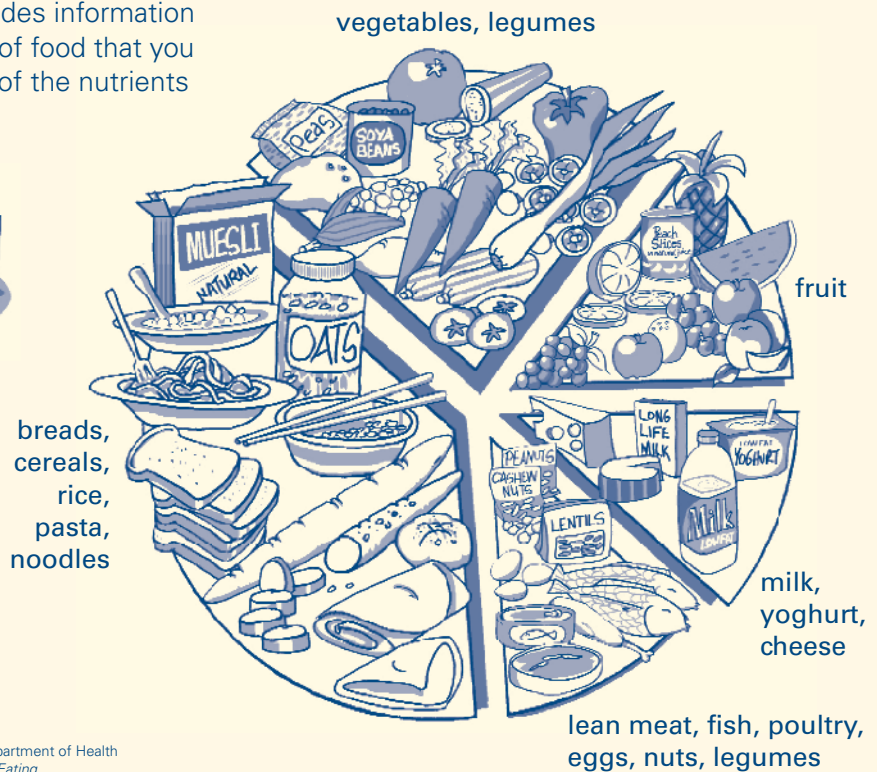
The basic daily food plan provides information about the amounts and kinds of food that you need each day to get enough of the nutrients essential for good health.



choose these items in small amounts



drink plenty of water



Based on diagram developed by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Family Services for *The Australian Guide to Healthy Eating*.

Limit or avoid alcohol

Alcohol is a risk factor for some cancers, particularly cancer of the mouth, pharynx, larynx, oesophagus, liver and breast. Limiting alcohol may also decrease the risk of cancer recurrence.

Cancer Council recommends that, to reduce the risk of cancer, you should limit or avoid alcohol. For people who do drink alcohol, the recommended amounts are:

- For men – an average of no more than two standard drinks a day.
- For women – an average of no more than one standard drink a day.

One standard drink is equal to:

- 100mL of wine
- 30mL (one nip) of spirits
- 60mL (two nips) of sherry
- 285mL (one middy) of normal strength beer
- 450mL (one schooner) of low alcohol (light) beer
- 220-250mL alcoholic soda (around $\frac{2}{3}$ bottle).

A balanced approach

The risks and benefits of alcohol vary for different diseases. Excess alcohol is associated with liver cirrhosis, stroke, high blood pressure and cancer, while a small amount of alcohol taken regularly may protect against heart disease. There are many other positive things that you can do to reduce your risk of heart disease, such as healthy eating, regular physical activity and not smoking. These healthy habits may also decrease your risk of cancer recurrence.



How can I drink less?

- Switch to light beer.
- Alternate alcoholic drinks with water.
- Order half nips of spirits.
- Use water to quench thirst and sip alcoholic drinks slowly.
- Don't fill wine glasses to the top.
- Wait until your glass is empty before topping it up to help keep count of your drinks.
- Enjoy wine spritzers (wine and soda or mineral water).
- Have a few alcohol-free days during the week, especially if you are a regular drinker.
- Eat while you drink to slow your drinking pace and to fill you up.
- Avoid salty snacks, which make you thirsty so you drink more.

Handle and prepare food safely

Food safety is particularly important for many people who have survived cancer. Some cancer treatments, such as chemotherapy, may weaken the immune system. People who have a weakened immune system are at increased risk of food borne illness (food poisoning).

Ways to keep your food safe

- Wash your hands with warm water and soap before preparing and cooking food.
- Keep counters, chopping boards and utensils clean.
- Avoid cross-contamination by using separate chopping boards and knives for preparing raw meat, fish or chicken.
- Thaw frozen foods in the refrigerator or microwave. Do not thaw frozen food on the kitchen bench.
- Keep hot food steaming hot and cold food cold (don't leave food sitting on the kitchen bench).
- Read expiry dates on food products and check for signs of food spoilage. If in doubt, throw it out.
- Keep cooked food on a higher shelf in the fridge above raw food to lower the chance of uncooked meat juices falling into cooked food.

Don't smoke

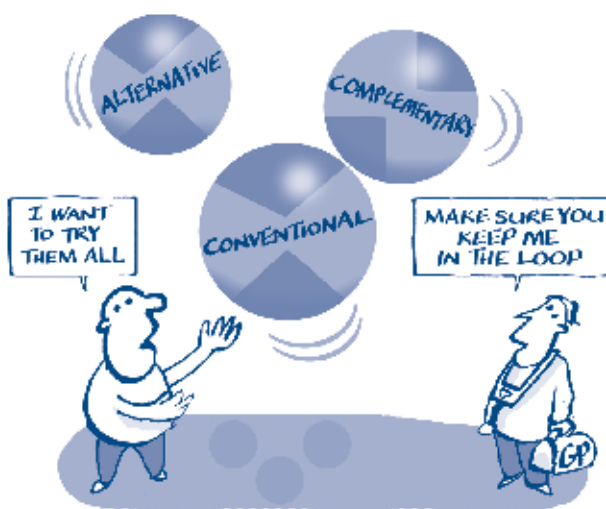
There is no safe level of tobacco use. Tobacco smoke contains over 4000 chemical compounds, including 43 known cancer causing agents (carcinogens) as well as numerous poisonous chemicals.

If you are a smoker, Cancer Council strongly recommends that you consider quitting. Call the Quitline on 13 7848 for a free Quit Pack, and to talk to a quitting adviser. The Quitline also offers a callback service for smokers who would like extra help to quit.

Your doctor should also be able to provide advice about quitting.

Make informed decisions

Many people who have recovered from cancer become very interested in health issues. It is important to consider the benefits and harms of complementary and alternative therapies, before starting any new therapies. Generally there is little or no evidence to suggest that alternative therapies will help prevent recurrence or secondary cancers. To help you make a safe and informed decision read the *Complementary therapies* booklet.



Dietary supplements

Dietary supplements are products that people add to their diet. There are many different types including vitamins and herbal tablets. People who have survived cancer often consider taking supplements to optimise their health. However, there is little scientific evidence to tell us whether they are of benefit or not.

Scientific research so far does not support the use of vitamins at doses above the recommended dietary intake.

We do know that eating vegetables and fruits may reduce the risk of some cancers. Vegetables and fruits contain a variety of vitamins, minerals and protective substances (like phytochemicals). We are only just beginning to discover the many beneficial plant substances that exist. A tablet cannot possibly replace the real thing.

As a general rule, dietary supplements should never replace whole foods. It is a good idea to discuss any dietary supplements with a dietitian or your doctor.

Breast cancer and soy supplements

There is no evidence that soy or phytoestrogen supplements prevent or cure any form of cancer. Some studies have indicated that phytoestrogens may stimulate existing tumour growth and antagonise the effects of some cancer treatment. While no clinical trials have been conducted to further test the results of these studies, Cancer Council recommends that women with breast cancer or who have recovered from breast cancer avoid taking soy or phytoestrogen supplements.

It's fine for people who have recovered from cancer to consume soy foods (such as soy milk, tofu, etc.) in moderation as part of a healthy diet.

Frequently asked questions

Should I stop eating meat?

There is no conclusive evidence to suggest that vegetarians or those who become vegetarians do better after a cancer diagnosis. Eating too much red meat, especially processed meats like sausages, bacon and frankfurts, is associated with a slightly increased risk of bowel cancer. It is important to eat a diet that is high in plant foods, like fruits, vegetables and cereal foods, but there is no need to completely give up meat.

Should I only eat organic foods?

The term organic is used to describe foods grown without pesticides or herbicides. Organic fruit and vegetables tend to be higher in vitamin C and lower in nitrates compared with conventionally grown varieties. However, all types of fruits and vegetables are beneficial to your health, whether they are organic or conventionally grown. There is no current evidence to suggest that organic fruit and vegetables are any more effective in reducing cancer risk than conventionally grown fruit and vegetables. It is a good idea to thoroughly wash all fruits and vegetables to remove any traces of pesticides.

Which is best – raw or cooked vegetables?

Try to include both raw (e.g. salad) and cooked vegetables. Boiling vegetables for a long time can reduce the amount of vitamins. Steaming and microwaving vegetables are good cooking methods to maintain their nutritional goodness.

Should I juice vegetables and fruit?

It is best to mostly eat vegetables and fruit whole rather than as juices because they contain fibre, which is protective against bowel cancer. Juices are much higher in kilojoules or calories than whole vegetables and fruit, which is a problem if you are watching your weight.

Emotions after cancer

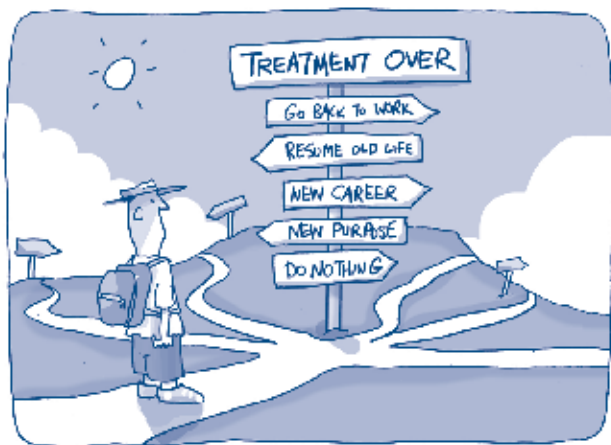
Cancer is not something you forget. After treatment stops, you might feel more anxious rather than more secure.

You may expect life to return to the way it was before you were diagnosed with cancer. This is impossible for some people with cancer – what used to be normal doesn't feel the same. Cancer may cause you to think about what's important to you. You may develop a new outlook on life, values and priorities. Conflict may develop if family and friends don't acknowledge the changes cancer has had on your life. Counselling can help you adjust to life after cancer. Reading *Emotions and Cancer* may also help, log onto www.cancercouncil.com.au or ring the Cancer Council Helpline on 13 11 20.

You may worry about the cancer coming back. This is normal. A cough, tiredness or lump may make you feel uneasy.

While research is continuing we don't have all the answers on how to prevent cancer recurring, eating well and being more active is a good start. The advice in this information sheet will also help improve your quality of life and reduce the chances of other health problems.

For many people with cancer, support needs to extend beyond diagnosis and treatment – maybe over a lifetime.



For more information

- Cancer Council Helpline 13 11 20
- Cancer Council New South Wales website: www.cancercouncil.com.au

Cancer Council Helpline

Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm

The Cancer Council Helpline is a telephone information service provided by Cancer Council NSW for people affected by cancer.

For the cost of a local call, you can talk about your concerns and needs confidentially with oncology health professionals. Helpline consultants can send you written information and put you in touch with appropriate services in your area. You can also request services in languages other than English.

You can call the Cancer Council Helpline, Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm. If calling outside business hours, you can leave a message and your call will be returned the next business day.

If you have difficulty communicating over the phone, contact the National Relay Service, a Government initiative to assist people who are hearing and/or speech impaired (www.relayservice.com.au). This service will help you to communicate with a Cancer Council Helpline consultant.

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First published January 2005
Reprinted September 2005, May 2009
Revised May 2007
© Cancer Council New South Wales 2009
ISBN 1 92104 155 2

Acknowledgements

We thank the reviewers of this information sheet: Susan Woodland, Communication Manager, Cancer Council NSW; Helen Baker, Dietitian, Cancer Council WA; Steve Pratt, Dietitian, Cancer Council WA; Simone Lee, Dietitian, Cancer Council SA; Marina Reeves, Dietitian and Behavioural Researcher, Queensland Cancer Fund; Janet Bell, Oncology Dietitian, St George Hospital; Jennifer Haughton, Oncology Dietitian, Wollongong Hospital; Charles Such, Oncology Dietitian, St Vincents Hospital; Jennifer Cohen, Oncology Dietitian, Sydney Children's Hospital, Randwick; Maureen Bousfield, Cancer Council NSW volunteer; and Sally Crossing, Cancer Voices NSW.

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Note to reader

Always consult your doctor before beginning any health treatment. This booklet is intended as a general introduction to the topic and should not be seen as a substitute for your doctor's or health professional's advice. However, you may wish to discuss issues raised in this booklet with them. All care is taken to ensure that the information in this booklet is accurate at the time of publication.

Cancer Council New South Wales

Cancer Council is the leading cancer charity in NSW. It plays a unique and important role in the fight against cancer through undertaking high-quality research, advocating on cancer issues, providing information and services to the public and people with cancer, and raising funds for cancer programs.

This booklet is funded through the generosity of the people of NSW. To make a donation to help defeat cancer, visit Cancer Council's website at www.cancercouncil.com.au or phone 1300 780 113.

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CAN1143 Date: 05/09 ABN 51 116 463 846

