



How to reduce cancer risk by eating well and being active

For a long time, it has been commonly believed that getting cancer is something that we have no control over. However, we now know much more about the causes of cancer than we did in the past. We know that maintaining a healthy weight, eating well and being active can lower your cancer risk. We also know that there are other benefits of this lifestyle – including preventing heart disease, diabetes and high blood pressure. After tobacco, lifestyle is the next most modifiable risk factor for reducing your risk of cancer.

You can take steps to lower your risk of developing cancer

There are three key ways to reduce your cancer risk:

- Maintain a healthy body weight
- Be physically active every day
- Enjoy a healthy diet

We know that these factors can reduce your risk of cancer by up to a quarter.

Cancer Council recommends you:

1. Maintain a healthy body weight
2. Be physically active for at least 30 minutes each day
3. Aim for at least two serves of fruit and five serves of vegetables each day
4. Eat a variety of wholegrain, wholemeal and high-fibre foods such as cereals, breads, rice and pasta
5. Have moderate amounts of lean red meat and limit or avoid processed meat
6. Limit or avoid drinking alcohol

1 Maintain a healthy body weight

Having excess body weight can increase your risk of cancer of the bowel, kidney, pancreas, oesophagus and endometrium (lining of the womb), as well as breast cancer (after menopause).

To maintain a healthy body weight, enjoy regular physical activity and eat according to your energy needs. Make fruit, vegetables, cereals and other low fat foods the basis of your diet. Cut back on foods and drinks high in fats and sugars, and try smaller portion sizes.

If you are overweight, losing weight isn't easy. However any weight loss will be beneficial. Remember that popular weight loss diets generally don't work in the long-term. It is better to make moderate changes to your diet and physical activity habits that you can maintain for a lifetime.



2 Be physically active for at least 30 minutes each day

Being physically active can help to reduce the risk of bowel, endometrium (lining of the womb) and breast cancer (after menopause).

To reduce your cancer risk, the more physically active you are the better. Put together at least 30 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity on most, if not all days of the week. As fitness improves aim for at least 60 minutes of moderate-intensity activity or 30 minutes of vigorous-intensity activity every day.

Moderate physical activity includes any activity in which you can still hold a conversation, such as brisk walking. Vigorous physical activity includes any activity that makes you 'huff and puff', such as fast swimming, cycling and jogging.

Being active, like healthy eating, requires some thought each day. It also needs to be kept up over a lifetime. Regular physical activity gives you extra energy and makes you feel great!

3 Aim for at least 2 serves of fruit and 5 serves of vegetables each day

While there is no one food that can protect against cancer, eating a wide range of fruit and vegetables may protect against cancer of the mouth, throat, oesophagus, stomach and bowel.

Fruit and vegetables are essential for a healthy balanced diet. They can help you to maintain a healthy body weight and are a great source of fibre, vitamins and minerals. They also contain natural protective substances, such as antioxidants, that can destroy cancer-causing agents (carcinogens).

Aim to eat two serves of fruit and five serves of vegetables every day. An example of a serve is 1 piece of fruit (or 2 small pieces e.g. apricots) and ½ a cup of cooked vegetables (or 1 cup salad vegetables).

What about taking vitamin and mineral supplements?

If you enjoy a wide variety of nutritious foods you will get the nutrients you need, reduce your cancer risk and are less likely to be overweight or obese. For most healthy people, vitamin and mineral supplements are not necessary when they eat well.



4 Eat a variety of wholegrain, wholemeal and high-fibre foods such as cereals, breads, rice and pasta

Dietary fibre can help lower the risk of bowel cancer. Wholegrain and wholemeal foods are high in dietary fibre. Other foods high in fibre include fruit, vegetables, seeds, nuts and legumes such as peas, beans and lentils.

Australian adults need to eat approximately 30g of dietary fibre per day. In order to reach this, Cancer Council recommends you eat at least 2 serves of wholegrain or wholemeal foods every day (or ensure about half your daily serves of breads and cereals are wholegrain or wholemeal varieties). An example of a serve is 2 slices of bread, 1 cup cooked rice or pasta, or 1 ⅓ cups of breakfast cereal.



5 Have moderate amounts of lean red meat and limit or avoid processed meat

Diets high in red meat (particularly processed meat) are associated with a slight increase in bowel cancer risk. However lean red meat is an important source of iron, zinc, vitamin B12 and protein.

Therefore you should eat moderate amounts of fresh red meat (65-100g of cooked red meat, 3-4 times a week) and limit or avoid eating processed meats such as sausages, frankfurts, salami, bacon and ham.

6 Limit or avoid drinking alcohol

Drinking alcohol increases the risk of developing some cancers, particularly cancers of the mouth, throat, oesophagus, bowel, liver and breast. Oral cancers are six times more common in alcohol drinkers than in non-drinkers.

It is not just heavy drinking that increases cancer risk. Even drinking small amounts of alcohol increases the risk of these cancers, and the more you drink, the greater the risk.

How much should I drink?

Cancer Council recommends that alcohol consumption should be limited or avoided.

For people who do drink alcohol, the recommended amounts are:

- an average of no more than 2 standard drinks a day
- to avoid binge drinking (excessive drinking in one session)
- to have one or two alcohol free days per week.