

Minimizing your cancer risks and maximizing your health



Though there are many factors that contribute to the onset of cancer, there are some lifestyle changes that can go a long way to reducing your cancer risk. Below you'll find information about the most common cancer risk factors and how you can take steps to reduce these risks.

Tobacco

- There are over 4,000 different chemicals in tobacco smoke and at least eleven are known to cause cancer.
- In addition to lung cancer, tobacco can also cause increased risk for cancer of the mouth, nasal cavities, larynx (voice box), pharynx (throat), esophagus (swallowing tube), stomach, liver, pancreas, kidney, bladder, and uterine, cervix, and for acute myeloid leukemia.¹

How to reduce your risk:

- Choose not to smoke or use tobacco of any kind (including pipe, cigar, spit and chew).
- If you do use tobacco products, quit as soon as possible. Every year away from tobacco reduces your risk even more.
- Avoid secondhand smoke.

Sun exposure

- The majority of the more than 1 million cases of non-melanoma (basal cell and squamous cell carcinoma) skin cancer diagnosed each year in the U.S. is caused by sun damage.
- Melanoma is the least common type of skin cancer, but it is responsible for most skin cancer deaths. It is also caused by sun damage to skin.

How to reduce your risk:

- Use sunscreen with an SPF of at least 15 when you're out in the sun.
- Wear a hat to protect the sensitive skin on your head and face.
- Cover up as often as possible. A T-shirt alone provides an SPF of 6 dry and 3 when wet. Tighter woven clothing can provide even more protection.
- Avoid the midday sun between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. in the summer when the sun is at its strongest.
- Steer clear of tanning beds. Tanning beds produce the same harmful UVA and UVB rays as the sun. Both can cause serious long-term skin damage and contribute to developing skin cancer.

Nutrition and physical activity²

- One third of cancer deaths can be linked to poor diet, physical inactivity and excess weight.

How to reduce your risk:

- Maintain a healthy weight (for most of us, this is what we weighed in high school).
- Adopt a physically active lifestyle by exercising 30 or more minutes most days during the week.
- Eat a healthy diet with an emphasis on plant sources which includes five fruits and vegetables each day, whole grains, limiting red meat to 2-3 times per week, and drinking at least 5-8 oz. of water each day.
- If you drink alcoholic beverages, limit your consumption to 1 drink per day.

General prevention³

Early detection through regular screenings is very important to reducing your cancer risk.

The following is a list of the most commonly recommended screenings and tests for adults:

- Start with a physical exam from your physician and continue to have a physical every 1-3 years, depending on your age.
- A colorectal cancer screening should be done annually for both men and women aged 50 and older. There are several types of screenings available; talk to your doctor about which one is right for you.
- Screenings for women
 - Yearly mammograms are recommended starting at age 40 and continuing for as long as a woman is in good health.
 - Cervical cancer screenings should begin for all women about 3 years after they begin having vaginal intercourse, but no later than 21 years old. This screening should be done annually with the regular Pap test or every 2 years using the newer, liquid-based test.
- Screenings for men
 - Prostate cancer screenings should, in general, be done annually beginning at age 50. For some men, screening should begin earlier. Talk to your doctor about the schedule that best suits your needs.

Footnotes:

¹ Source: Cancer Facts and Figures 2008

² Developed by the American Cancer Society 2006 Nutrition and Physical Activity Guidelines Advisory Committee and approved by the American Cancer Society National Board of Directors on May 19, 2006.

³ From the American Cancer Society *Cancer Facts & Figures 2008*. Atlanta, GA: American Cancer Society; 2008.

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