

Cancer Prevention and Diet

Does diet affect my chances of getting cancer?

Research is being done to find out more about how diet affects cancer. There is still much to be learned. Many cancers have unknown causes. However, there is evidence that making some changes in your diet will help decrease your risk.

What kind of diet will help prevent cancer?

- Eat at least 5 cups of fruits and vegetables every day. Phytochemicals are natural chemicals found only in plants. Phytochemicals include antioxidants and other chemicals that help reduce cancer risk. It is better to get these chemicals from plants than from supplements. Antioxidants are found in foods such as citrus fruits, kiwi, cantaloupe, broccoli, cabbage, avocados, and leafy green vegetables. Antioxidants help prevent or repair damage to cells caused by pollution, sunlight, and normal body processes. Aim for a variety of colorful fruits and vegetables everyday for improved health and lower cancer risk. Fresh or frozen fruits and vegetables have a higher nutritional value than canned fruits and vegetables.
- Eat more whole-grain breads, pastas, and cereals. Avoid refined and processed products.
- Eat calcium-rich foods, such as skim dairy products, leafy greens, and beans. Foods high in calcium may reduce the risk of colorectal cancer. But too much calcium, from supplements or food, may increase the risk of prostate cancer. Ask your healthcare provider how much calcium you should have in your diet.
- Eat less fat. When you eat meat, trim off the fat and skin. Use nonfat or low-fat dairy products. Remember that many desserts are usually high in both fats and calories.
- Eat less red meat (beef, lamb, pork). Also eat less smoked, canned, and processed meat and fish.
- Eat more fish and white meat from chicken and turkey. Fish is a good source of omega-3 fatty acids. Omega-3s may prevent cancer or slow its growth. However, be sure to eat a variety of fish. Tuna, swordfish, and mackerel may have high levels of mercury and other chemicals.
- Change how you cook. Grilling, broiling, and frying meat at a high temperature creates chemicals that may increase your cancer risk. The same meat cooked in a stew or steamed, poached, or microwaved is safer. Cooking vegetables for a long time can remove important nutrients. Use microwaving and steaming for quicker cook times.
- Drink alcohol moderately if at all. Too much alcohol increases your risk of cancers of the mouth, throat, larynx, esophagus, breast, and liver. Women should have no more than 1 drink a day. Men should have no more than 2 drinks a day.

- Ask your healthcare provider about vitamin and mineral supplements, including vitamin D, (now being studied for its possible benefit in cancer prevention) if you don't drink milk or get much sunlight.
- If you are overweight, talk to your provider about healthy ways to lose weight. Being overweight increases your risk for breast, colon, kidney, and esophagus cancer. It may also increase your risk for prostate, gallbladder, pancreas, and ovarian cancer.
- Get enough fiber in your diet. Fiber is plant material that is not digested. Fiber may lower the risk of some types of cancer, such as colorectal cancer. Fiber keeps food moving through the bowel. It can also help you keep a healthy weight by making you feel full on fewer calories.

Diet and lifestyle changes can help you take control of your health. Make healthy choices about the foods you eat, regular physical activity, weight, alcohol, and smoking. Talk to your healthcare provider if you have questions or special concerns about your risk of cancer.

Developed by RelayHealth.

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