

# Protecting Yourself from Cancer

People once thought that there was little that they could do to protect themselves against cancer. In recent years, however, scientists have learned that your habits and behaviors may increase or decrease your risk of cancer. Here are some tips for protecting yourself from cancer:

- If you use tobacco in any form, try to quit as soon as possible. Cigarette and cigar smoking, chewing tobacco, and snuff cause cancer of the lung, throat, mouth, and esophagus. Also, stay away from people who are smoking. Secondhand smoke can cause lung cancer even if you don't smoke. Smoking is also a strong risk factor for bladder cancer. Smoking has also been linked to cancer of the cervix in women.
- Try to limit the amount of saturated fat in your diet. Eating too much saturated fat may increase the risk for colon, prostate, and breast cancer.
- Get 7 to 9 hours of sleep each night. The amount of sleep you get affects certain hormones in your body. When these hormones are not at the right levels, your body may be less able to defend itself against cancer.
- Eat 4 to 5 servings of fruits and vegetables every day. The fiber and antioxidants in these foods may help protect against some types of cancer.
- Stay fit with the right kind of exercise for you. A healthy goal for most adults is to exercise for 2 hours and 30 minutes or more each week. You don't need to do 30 minutes of activity all at once. You can do shorter periods, but at least 10 minutes at a time. Exercise may reduce your risk for lung, colon, breast, and prostate cancer.
- Try to keep a healthy weight. If you are overweight, lose weight. Being overweight increases your risk for cancer of the esophagus, thyroid, breast, uterus, kidney, pancreas, colon, and gallbladder.
- If you want to drink alcohol, ask your healthcare provider how much is safe for you to drink. Drinking too much alcohol is related to cancer of the nose, mouth, tongue, digestive tract, liver, and breast.
- Avoid a lot of exposure to UV radiation, such as being in the sun or using tanning beds. Use sunscreen and a hat whenever you go out in the sun. Most skin cancer is related to being in the sun.
- When working with or around chemicals that can cause cancer, use protective gear such as gloves, protective clothing, and masks. Follow the manufacturer's instructions when you use chemicals at home or in the yard.
- Protect yourself from viruses.
  - Some sexually transmitted viruses, such as human papillomavirus (HPV), increase the risk of cervical and anal cancers. Be sure your partner does not have any sexually transmitted disease. Use a latex or polyurethane condom every time you have sex unless you are in a long-term relationship with the same partner and your partner has no other sexual partners.
  - Don't use illegal drugs. They can expose you to hepatitis B, hepatitis C, and AIDS/HIV viruses. These viruses are related to cancer of the liver and other cancers.

- Ask your healthcare provider if the HPV or hepatitis B shots are recommended for you.
- Do regular self-exams as recommended by your healthcare provider. Men should examine their testicles, and women should examine their breasts regularly. Everyone should check their skin for moles or other skin changes.
- See your healthcare provider for a checkup and cancer screening as often as your healthcare provider recommends. If cancer is discovered early, treatment is much more successful. Ask your healthcare provider what cancer screening tests are recommended for your age and family history.

Lifestyle habits affect your health over many years. Set some goals and try to practice healthy habits. If you do, you may lower your chances for cancer.

For more information, contact:

- American Cancer Society, Inc.  
800-227-2345  
<http://www.cancer.org>
- National Cancer Institute  
800-422-6237 (TTY: 800-332-8615)  
<http://www.cancer.gov>

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