



Nutrition & Cancer Prevention

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The National Cancer Institute estimates that at least 35% of all cancers have a nutritional connection. When lifestyle factors such as smoking and exercise are included the associated risk becomes much stronger and may be as high as 85%. Being overweight or obese (extremely overweight) raises the risk of many health conditions, including cancer. In the United States, it is estimated that more than 40,000 cancer diagnoses each year are caused by obesity. In addition, overweight and obesity cause 15% to 20% of all cancer-related deaths each year.

How can you reduce your risks of cancer? The American Institute of Cancer Research (AICR) states maintaining a healthy body weight, increasing physical activity, and eating a balanced diet that includes vegetables, fruits, and whole grains may help lower the risk of developing cancer. These recommendations agree with [dietary guidelines](#) published by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to promote good health and reduce risk of chronic diseases.

- Healthy Body Weight – Being overweight or obese is related to as many as one in five cancer-related deaths. Maintaining a healthy weight is one of the most important things you can do to reduce your risk of cancer. Weight is most closely connected with cancers of the breast in postmenopausal women, colon, endometrium, kidney and esophagus. A connection also exists with cancers of the pancreas, gallbladder, thyroid, ovary and cervix.

Maintaining a healthy weight is one of the most important things you can do to reduce your risk of cancer. Aim to be at the lower end of the healthy BMI range.

- Physical Activity – Being active helps reduce your cancer risk by helping with weight control, and can also reduce your risk by influencing hormone levels and your immune system. The latest recommendations for adults call for at least 30 minutes of intentional moderate to vigorous activity a day -- this is over and above usual daily activities like using the stairs instead of the elevator at your office or doing housework -- on 5 or more days per week. For kids, the recommendation is 60 minutes or more a day.
- Fruits, Vegetables, and Legumes - You need to eat *at least* 5 servings of vegetables (including legumes) and fruits each day, especially those with the most color (a sign of high nutrient content). Eating plenty of fruits and vegetables, including beans, is linked with a lower risk of lung, oral, esophageal, stomach and colon cancer. By eating fruits and vegetables of a variety of different colors, one can get the best all-around health benefits. Each different color fruit and vegetables contains unique health components that are essential to our health.

Carotenoids, the pigment that gives fruits and vegetables their dark colors, have been shown to help prevent cancer. Beta-carotene, present in dark green and yellow vegetables, helps protect against lung cancer and may help prevent cancers of the bladder, mouth, larynx, esophagus, breast, and other sites.

- Whole Grains - Aim for at least 3 servings of whole grains each day. Whole grains, rather than refined grains, give you the total benefit of many natural plant compounds that can lower your risk of cancer. Whole grains are fully loaded with many plant compounds that can protect your cells from the kind of damage that may lead to the development of cancer. Whole grains are rich in fiber, vitamins, minerals and hundreds of natural plant compounds, called phytochemicals, which protect cells from the types of damage that may lead to cancer. Enriched refined grains may have these benefits mixed back in to the finished food product, but fiber is not always part of that enrichment -- so read your food labels carefully.

For more information, contact a registered dietitian at www.eatrightwv.org.

