

## Dietary advice for cancer prevention

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### Cancer prevention

Diet and lifestyle can play an important role in preventing cancer. It is estimated that between 30% and 50% of all cancer cases are preventable.<sup>1</sup>

Not smoking and avoiding exposure to tobacco smoke is one of the most important ways of reducing cancer risk.<sup>1</sup>

Maintaining a healthy weight throughout life by eating a healthy diet and being physically active is the next most important step you can take to reduce your risk of cancer.<sup>1</sup>



Image: World Obesity Federation

### How to achieve a healthy weight

- **Being physically active:**

For cancer prevention it is likely that the more exercise you do, the greater the benefit. Exercise doesn't mean just going to the gym. Moderate activity includes household chores, gardening and dancing. Vigorous activity includes running, playing team sports or fast swimming.

Try to minimise the amount of time you are sedentary. If you sit down a lot at work or whilst watching TV make sure you have regular breaks where you move around.

- **Eat plenty fibre**

Fibre has been proven to be an essential nutrient for gut health, helping digestion and preventing constipation. There is strong evidence that eating foods containing fibre protects against colorectal (bowel) cancer.<sup>1,2</sup>

In addition, fibre helps protect against weight gain and obesity. Most adults are only eating an average of 18g of fibre a day. **Increasing fibre intake to 30g a day is recommended** as part of a healthy balanced diet. Foods which can help increase your fibre intake are:

- Higher-fibre breakfast cereals and porridge oats
- Wholegrains like brown rice, wholemeal bread or seeded wholegrain bread or wholemeal pasta
- Beans, lentils and chickpeas
- Fruit and vegetables
- Nuts and seeds

- **Eat a diet rich in wholegrains, vegetables, fruit and pulses:**

Try to choose **wholegrains** when possible. For example, if you are choosing bread try wholemeal. If you are finding it difficult to adjust to the taste try the 50% wholemeal and 50% white flour option and, once you get used to the taste you can switch to the 100% wholemeal. Also try wholewheat pasta and brown rice.

Having at least 5 portions of **fruit and veg** a day will provide you with essential nutrients as well as fibre in your diet. Choosing a range of fruit and veg will give you a variety of different vitamins as well as nutrients. When you are preparing a salad try to mix vegetables with different colours. It not only it looks better but you get different nutrients too.

**Pulses such as beans and lentils** also count towards one of your 5-a-day fruit and veg intake. They provide beneficial fibre and plant protein which will help satisfy your hunger and keep you feeling full for longer.

- **Limit 'fast foods' and processed foods high in fat, starches or sugars:**

There is strong evidence that diets with a high amount of these foods are a cause of weight gain and obesity as they increase the risk of excess energy intake. Greater body fatness can be a cause of many cancers.<sup>1</sup>

Foods such as chips, crisps, products made from white flour such as bread, pasta and pizza; cakes, pastries and biscuits and confectionary should be eaten in small amounts and infrequently.

- **Limit sugar sweetened drinks:**

There is strong evidence that regular consumption of sugar sweetened drinks is a cause of weight gain.<sup>1</sup> Drink water or unsweetened drinks instead.

### **Limit consumption of red and processed meat**

There is strong evidence that consumption of red meat and processed meat are causes of colorectal cancer.<sup>1</sup>

Red meat such as beef, lamb and pork, is nutrient dense and can be included as part of a

healthy diet. However, limit consumption to no more than 3 portions per week. This is around 350 to 500g (cooked weight) of red meat.

Processed meats such as bacon, ham, salami, pâté, hot dogs and some sausages should be eaten very little or not at all. These meats are generally energy dense and can contain high levels of salt. Some of the preservation methods used (e.g. smoking, curing and salting) and the addition of chemical preservatives are known to produce carcinogens (cancer promoting compounds).

Red meat is a good source of protein, iron and other micronutrients. For those who avoid red meat but eat other foods of animal origin, poultry and fish are useful substitutes. Eggs and dairy are also useful sources of protein and micronutrients and foods such as pulses and cereals are a source of plant proteins and beneficial nutrients.

### **Limit alcohol consumption**

According to Cancer Research UK alcohol can cause 7 different cancers.<sup>3</sup> The types of the alcoholic drink you are choosing don't matter, it is the alcohol itself which increases the risk. For prevention of cancer, it's best not to drink alcohol. If you do, it is important to not drink more than the UK Government's guidelines - no more than 14 units of alcohol per week for both men and women.<sup>4</sup> If you are drinking alcohol it is advised to spread your drinking evenly over 3 or more days.

#### References

1. World Cancer Research Fund. Continuous Update Project. Available: <https://www.wcrf.org/sites/default/files/Recommendations.pdf>
2. British Dietetic Association, Fibre: Food Fact Sheet. Available: <https://www.bda.uk.com/resource/fibre.html>
3. Cancer Research UK, Does alcohol cause cancer? Available: <https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/causes-of-cancer/alcohol-and-cancer/does-alcohol-cause-cancer>
4. Department of Health, UK Chief Medical Officers' Low Risk Drinking Guidelines. Available: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/545937/UK\\_CMOs\\_report.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/545937/UK_CMOs_report.pdf)