

# From the Nutritionist

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Cancer is something that many people don't like to think about, but it touches almost all of us at some time during our lives, by affecting a friend, family member, or even ourselves. Although cancer is the second most common cause of death in the US, advances in preventing, detecting, and treating cancer are being made all the time.

While there are certain aspects of cancer risk that we can't control, such as our family history of cancer, a large percentage of cancer-related deaths are directly linked to lifestyle choices such as smoking, drinking alcohol, a lack of exercise, excessive sun exposure, and an unhealthy diet. See which of these tips you can incorporate into your lifestyle to help reduce your risk:

- **Manage your weight.** Aim to be at a healthy weight for your height, but if you are overweight even a modest amount of weight loss can provide health benefits, including reducing the risk of certain cancers.
- **Focus on plant based foods.** In numerous studies, the diets that are most protective against cancer consist of mostly plant foods.
- **Bulk up on fiber.** It keeps your digestive tract running smoothly, and helps to clear out any cancer-causing compounds you may have in your body before they can do damage. Good sources of fiber are whole grains, beans, fruits and vegetables.
- **Watch the fat.** Limit unhealthy saturated fats, found mainly in animal products such as red meat and high fat dairy products, and trans fats, found in some margarines and processed foods. Choose more unsaturated fats which come from plant sources (like olive and canola oils, nuts and avocados) and fatty fish like salmon and tuna.
- **Cut down on meat.** This doesn't mean you have to become a vegetarian, but try reducing your intake by having meat less often, eating smaller portions of meat, or using meat as a flavoring or side dish, not the entrée.
- **Consume antioxidants and phytochemicals.** These nutrients protect against cancer, boost immunity and fight disease. Find them in fruits and vegetables, especially brightly colored ones. The greater the variety of colors that you include, the greater the variety of nutrients.
- **Don't count on vitamin supplements to decrease risk.** It's possible that high amounts of some nutrients taken in supplement form can actually increase the risk of certain cancers.
- **Drink plenty of water,** which is essential to all body processes including removing wastes and toxins from the body, and transporting nutrients to all the organs.
- **Avoid carcinogens in your food.** These cancer causing substances can form when oils are cooked at a high temperature, meats are burned or charred (as on a barbecue), or meats are cured, dried or preserved (as in bacon, sausage, and beef jerky). They can also form as foods start to spoil, such as oils that go rancid when exposed to heat, light or air.
- **If you drink, do so in moderation.** While a moderate amount of alcohol may have certain health benefits, excessive intake has been linked to certain cancers. Moderate drinking is considered up to one drink per day for women and up to 2 drinks per day for men.
- **Exercise regularly.** Exercise has been found to decrease the risk of certain cancers. Aim for at least 150 minutes per week of moderate intensity aerobic activity.

*Andrea Hart, registered dietitian nutritionist and New York State-certified dietitian/nutritionist, is available for free, confidential, one-on-one counseling and as a speaker or facilitator for campus groups, panels or classes.*

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