

Expert

9 ways to cut your risk of cancer

Research from the World Cancer Research Fund reveals some important steps you can take.

Each day, around 50 Australian women are diagnosed with breast or gynaecological cancer, and 1 in 2 Australian men will be diagnosed with cancer by the age of 85. Whether it's you or someone you love, this disease affects most of us.

These statistics are a good reason to do what we can to reduce our risk, but it's hard to know what advice to follow. The most reliable source of information will always be backed by strong, scientific evidence. Current, leading research comes from the World Cancer Research Fund (WCRF), and has resulted in nine pieces of advice to reduce the risk of one third of all cancers.

1. Stay within the healthy weight range

One indication of a healthy weight is your BMI (body mass index), which is calculated by dividing your weight in kilograms by your height in metres squared. The healthy range is from 18.5 - 24.9, and while it has its limitations, it's a valuable tool to help us maintain healthy weight.

2. Be active

Aim for 30 minutes of exercise every day, or 60 minutes if you're fit. And keep off seats as much as possible – sitting for long periods can promote cancer risk.

3. Limit high energy foods and drinks

Soft drink, fast food and snacks like chips and chocolate are all high energy, and make healthy weight harder to maintain. They often contain high amounts of salt and the types of fats which promote cancer.

4. Love your plant foods

Five serves of vegetables and two serves of fruit is the general daily recommendation, and includes grain foods and legumes. An easy way to eat more of these is to serve your vegetables with something like brown rice, quinoa or chickpeas.

5. Limit red meat and processed meat

Aim for no more than 500 g of red meat a week (a portion the size of your fist is around 65g). Processed meats include anything smoked, cured, salted or chemically preserved (like bacon, salami and ham).

6. Limit your alcohol

While it's better to not drink, aim for no more than one standard drink a day for women or two standard drinks a day for men. It's also important to limit yourself to no more than four standard drinks on any one occasion.

7. Stay away from salt and mould

The WCRF recommends no more than 5 g of salt a day (this is a teaspoon). This isn't easy, especially with the amount of salt added to everyday foods (like bread). While the overall goal is to eat more whole foods and fewer processed foods anyway, start looking at packaging and select foods with lower salt.

Also, grains and legumes contain aflatoxin, a type of mould which can cause liver damage (in rare cases). Always store these foods correctly and follow best before dates.

8. Eat food, not supplements

Supplements can't replace all the fantastic parts of whole foods. Unless recommended by your doctor, aim for the food first, and keep your diet as complete as possible.

9. Breastfeed

Interestingly, breastfeeding for six months (followed by complementary feeding) can help protect both mother and baby from cancers.

→ For more information on cancer and healthier lifestyles, head to medibank.com.au/livebetter



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