
Cancer Prevention Eating Guidelines

When it comes to lowering your risk of getting cancer, there are some things you can't control, like age, sex, and family history. The good news, however, is that there are many things you can control and that these things can make a difference.

This handout provides advice and tips on three important parts of a healthy lifestyle: diet, weight, and physical activity. Eating a healthy diet, being at a healthy weight, and keeping physically active can prevent up to 1/3 of the most common cancers and up to 1/2 of all colorectal (bowel) cancers.

Extra information on some topics is listed in the Additional Resources section at the end.



Steps you can take

Eat more plant foods.

Plant foods include vegetables, fruits, whole grains, legumes (lentils, beans and peas), nuts, and seeds. These foods provide vitamins, minerals, and other plant compounds that have cancer-protective effects. They also provide fibre, which protects against colorectal cancer.

Most plant foods in their natural form are lower in calories than many other foods. Eating mostly plant foods to meet your nutrient needs can satisfy your hunger while making it easier to stay at a healthy weight.

Make plant foods the focus of your meals and snacks.

- Fill 1/2 of your plate with vegetables and fruits at each meal.
 - Choose vegetables and fruit in a variety of colours, including dark green and orange, every day. Fresh, frozen or canned vegetables and fruits without added salt or sugar are all healthy choices. If you drink fruit juice, limit yourself to no more than 125 mL (1/2 cup) per day.
- Fill 1/4 of your plate with grains or starchy foods like potatoes, yams, or corn.

- Make most of your grain choices “whole grain,” like oats, brown rice, quinoa, or barley. They can be used as a side dish or added to salads, soups, or stews.
- Fill up to ¼ of your plate with protein-rich foods. Choose legumes, tofu, seeds, nuts, and nut butters often, instead of meat or poultry.
 - Try plant-based meals that include legumes, nuts, and seeds in place of meat, like hummus in a sandwich, edamame and a sprinkle of pumpkin seeds on a salad, or black beans in a soft-shell taco.

Limit foods that are high in added fat, sugar, and salt.

Foods with high amounts of added fat and sugar supply a lot of calories that most people don't need. When we eat and drink these foods regularly, it increases the chance of weight gain and becoming overweight or obese, which increases the risk of cancer.

Examples of foods high in added fat or sugar include:

- many convenience foods like most instant noodle soups, and frozen pizzas
- fried food items such as French fries, fried chicken, and fast food burgers
- rich baked goods such as cakes, cookies, muffins, donuts, croissants, and other pastries
- sweet and salty snacks like chips, cheese puffs, frozen desserts, milk shakes, candy, chocolate bars, and crackers
- sugary drinks like soft drinks, energy and sports drinks, fruit drinks, cocktails and punches, lemonade, sweet iced tea, slushes, specialty coffee and tea drinks, and sweetened vitamin-enhanced waters

Many of these foods are also high in salt (sodium). Salt might be a risk factor for stomach cancer.

Enjoying the foods you eat is important. Healthy eating for cancer prevention doesn't mean that you can never eat foods with higher amounts of fat, sugar, and salt. Decide how and when these foods fit into your plans to reduce your risk. Here are some tips:

- Keep these foods as “sometimes” foods rather than “every day” foods, and keep your portion small when you eat them.
- Choose lower-calorie drink options most often: water, milk, and unsweetened tea and coffee.
- Make foods from scratch whenever possible. It’s easier to make healthier choices when you make the food yourself.

Eat less red meat and avoid processed meats.

Eating too much red meat (beef, pork, goat, and lamb) increases the risk of colorectal cancer.

Small amounts of red meat can still be part of a healthy diet. Meat is a good source of iron, protein, vitamin B12, and zinc. If you include red meat, limit the amount you eat to no more than 500 grams (18 ounces) per week.

- Tips to make this happen:
 - When you eat meat, work toward only filling up to a ¼ of the plate with the meat. This will make room to fill half your plate with vegetables and fruit.
 - Think of meat as the garnish rather than the centrepiece of your meal. Plan your meals around vegetables and grains instead.
 - Cook and serve smaller pieces of lean meat. Meat often comes from the store in much larger portions than we need. Cut these into smaller portions of about 75 grams (2½ ounces). Smaller pieces will make it easier to eat a smaller amount.
 - Make stir fries and main-course salads. These typically have smaller meat portions.
 - Eat plant-based meals more often. Use tofu and legumes instead of meat in recipes. Try spaghetti sauce, chilies, and casseroles with soybean curds, red lentils, kidney beans or other beans to replace some or all of the meat.
 - Eat small portions of fish, seafood, and poultry instead of red meat.

Processed meats increase the risk of colorectal and stomach cancers. Processed meats include ham, bacon, sausage, salami, hot dogs, pepperoni, many deli

meats, and bologna. They may be made from beef, pork, poultry, fish, or other meats that have been preserved by smoking, curing, or with additives like nitrates. Products that are preserved with naturally-occurring nitrites such as celery extract are still considered processed meats and may also increase risk of cancer.

- If you choose to eat processed meat, eat it in small amounts and less often, like ham at a holiday dinner or a hot dog at a hockey game.

Limit alcohol.

Alcohol can increase the risk of colorectal, breast, liver, mouth, larynx and pharynx (throat), and esophagus cancers.

Choose food rather than vitamin or mineral supplements for cancer prevention.

Taking supplements to prevent cancer is not routinely recommended. Dietary supplements haven't been found to prevent cancer for everyone, nor are they always safe. For example, high doses of beta-carotene supplements increase risk of lung cancer in smokers.

Most people can get enough vitamins and minerals from eating a healthy, balanced cancer-prevention diet. For some people, specific supplements are recommended to meet nutrient needs. If you are concerned or unsure about your need for supplements, speak with your doctor or registered dietitian before starting supplements.

Work towards or stay at a healthy body size.

Overweight and obesity increases the risk for esophageal, pancreatic, liver, colorectal, uterine (uterus or womb), and kidney cancers, as well as breast cancer after menopause. Risk for stomach, gallbladder, advanced prostate, and ovarian cancers may also be increased.

A healthy diet and active lifestyle can help you have a healthy body, which is important for reducing cancer risk.

Be active every day.

Being active lowers your risk for colorectal and may decrease risk of uterine cancers, as well as breast cancer after menopause. In addition, physical activity can help you maintain a healthy body and provide other health benefits.

- Include at least 30 minutes of activity, like brisk walking, every day. Added benefits are seen with longer and more intense activity such as:
 - 60 minutes or more of moderate activity (for example, brisk walking, cycling, dancing, or swimming) or
 - 30 minutes of vigorous physical activity (for example, running or tennis).
- If you are not already active, check with your doctor before starting any exercise plan.
- As you become active, gradually increase the number of minutes you are active each week, working towards the first goal of 30 minutes every day.
- To make time for activity, limit sedentary activities such as watching television and sitting at the computer.

Set SMART goals.

Even when you're motivated to improve your health, change can sometimes feel overwhelming. To get started, make SMART goals. SMART goals are ones that are **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**ction-oriented, **R**ealistic and **T**imely. Small, gradual changes to improve what you eat and how active you are can make a difference for cancer prevention.



Additional Resources

For information and advice based on your specific food and nutrition needs and preferences, call **8-1-1** and ask to speak to a HealthLink BC dietitian.

For additional information, see the following:

- HealthLink BC www.healthlinkbc.ca – Get medically approved non-emergency health information.

These resources are provided as sources of additional information believed to be reliable and accurate at the time of publication and should not be considered an endorsement of any information, service, product or company.

Distributed by:

Dietitian Services at HealthLinkBC (formerly Dial-A-Dietitian), providing free nutrition information and resources for BC residents and health professionals. Go to www.healthlinkbc.ca or call **8-1-1** (anywhere in BC). Interpreters are available in over 130 languages.