



# Cancer Prevention

In 2008, there were an estimated 12.7 million cancer cases and 7.6 million cancer deaths worldwide, despite overwhelming evidence that many cancers are preventable. Survival rates are improving, but over half a million people die from cancer each year in the United States alone. Cancer outranks heart disease as the number one cause of death in the U.S. for those under the age of 85.

Cancer prevention is action taken to lower the chance of getting cancer. Prevention offers the most cost-effective long-term strategy for the control of cancer. If you're concerned about cancer prevention, take comfort in the fact that small changes in your daily life can make a big difference.

## 1. Quit smoking

Tobacco use remains the single largest preventable cause of disease and premature death in the U.S., yet more than 45 million Americans still smoke cigarettes. Tobacco use accounts for 21 percent of worldwide total cancer deaths. Approximately one-half of all smokers die of a tobacco-related disease, and adult smokers lose an average of 13 years of life due to this addiction. Tobacco smoking causes many types of cancer, including cancers of the lung, esophagus, larynx (voice box), mouth, throat, kidney, bladder, pancreas, stomach and cervix. About 70% of the lung cancer burden can be attributed to smoking alone.

Second-hand smoke (SHS), also known as "environmental tobacco smoke," has been proven to cause lung cancer in nonsmoking adults. Smokeless tobacco (also called oral tobacco, chewing tobacco or snuff) causes oral, esophageal and pancreatic cancer.

## 2. Eat a healthy diet, maintain a healthy weight and include physical activity in your daily routine

Dietary modification is another important approach to cancer control. There is a link between overweight and obesity to many types of cancer such as esophagus, colon, breast, uterus and kidney. Diets high in fruits and vegetables may have a protective effect against many cancers. Conversely, excess consumption of red and

preserved meat may be associated with an increased risk of colorectal cancer.

In addition, healthy eating habits that prevent the development of diet-associated cancers will also lower the risk of heart disease. Eat five or more servings of a variety of vegetables and fruits each day. Choose whole grains over processed (refined) grains. Limit intake of processed and red meats.

Regular physical activity and the maintenance of a healthy body weight, along with a healthy diet, will considerably reduce cancer risk. Adopt a physically active lifestyle.

Adults: Engage in at least 30 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity, above usual activities, on five or more days of the week; 45 to 60 minutes of intentional physical activity are preferable.

Children and adolescents: Engage in at least 60 minutes per day of moderate to vigorous physical activity at least five days per week.

## 3. Limit alcohol intake

If you drink alcoholic beverages, limit your intake. Drink no more than one drink per day for women or two per day for men. Alcohol use is a risk factor for many cancer types including cancer of the oral cavity, pharynx, larynx, esophagus, liver, colon and breast. Risk of cancer increases with the amount of alcohol consumed. The risk from heavy drinking for several cancer types (e.g. oral cavity, pharynx, larynx and esophagus) substantially increases if the person is also a heavy smoker.

Attributable fractions vary between men and women for certain types of alcohol-related cancer, mainly because of differences in average levels of consumption. For example, 22% of mouth and oropharynx cancers in men are attributable to alcohol whereas in women, the attributable burden drops to 9%. A similar sex difference exists for esophageal and liver cancers.

## 4. Protect yourself from the sun

Skin cancer is one of the most common kinds of cancer — and one of the most preventable. Try these tips: Avoid midday sun. Stay out of the sun between 10 am and 4 pm, when the sun's rays are strongest. Stay in the shade. When you're outdoors, stay in the shade as much as possible. Sunglasses and a broad-rimmed hat help,

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too. Cover exposed areas. Wear tightly woven, loose-fitting clothing that covers as much of your skin as possible. Don't skimp on sunscreen. Use generous amounts of sunscreen when you're outdoors, and reapply often. Ideally, about one ounce of sunscreen (about a palmful) should be used to cover the arms, legs, neck and face of the average adult. For best results, most sunscreens must be reapplied at least every two hours and even more often if you are swimming or sweating. Products labeled "waterproof" may provide protection for at least 80 minutes even when you are swimming or sweating. Products that are "water resistant" may protect for only 40 minutes.

Avoid tanning beds and sunlamps. Many people believe the UV rays of tanning beds are harmless. This is not true. Tanning lamps give out UVA and usually UVB rays as well. Both UVA and UVB rays can cause long-term skin damage, and can contribute to skin cancer. Most skin doctors and health organizations recommend not using tanning beds and sun lamps.

#### 5. Get vaccinations against Hepatitis B and Human papillomavirus and avoid risky behaviors

Cancer prevention includes protection from certain viral infections including HIV, Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C and Human papillomavirus. Talk to your doctor about immunization against Hepatitis B and Human papillomavirus. The human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine helps prevent most cervical cancers and some vaginal and vulvar cancers. The HPV vaccine is available to both men and women age 26 or younger who didn't have the vaccine as an adolescent. The hepatitis B vaccine can help reduce liver cancer risk. The hepatitis B vaccine is routinely given to infants. It's also recommended for certain high-risk adults.

#### 6. Take early detection seriously

Regular screening for various types of cancers — such as cancer of the skin, colon, prostate, cervix and breast — can increase your chances of discovering cancer early, when treatment is most likely to be successful. Ask your doctor about the best cancer screening schedule for you.

Many cancers are preventable. Basic lifestyle changes can have a tremendous impact on the rates of cancer. The fact that such changes also protect against other chronic diseases (cardiovascular disease, stroke, and diabetes) makes the case for prevention even more compelling. ■

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