

# The Wellness News

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## Cancer prevention: 5 strategies to reduce your risk

October hosts both Breast Cancer Awareness Month and the Great American Smokeout. Both of these events remind us of the impact of a very serious disease. Cancer impacts the lives of many Americans; however, great strides have been made in treating those afflicted. We also know that making healthy lifestyle choices can drastically cut back on the risk of developing cancer. Here are some of the most effective prevention strategies:

**Avoid Tobacco Use:** It is no secret that using tobacco is one of the worst things we can do for our health. Not only can it contribute to a range of illnesses, including heart disease and emphysema, it is also strongly linked to many types of cancers:

- Nearly one third of cancers occurring in the U.S. are attributed to tobacco use.
- 80% of lung cancer cases are associated with tobacco use or exposure.
- Tobacco use can cause cancers of the lungs, throat, mouth, esophagus, kidneys and pancreas.
- Even second and third hand smoke exposure can put people at risk for certain types of cancer.

Quitting is not easy, but it is one of the best ways to preserve your own health and the health of those around you.

**Avoid Overexposure to Sun:** Sun can be healthy in small doses, as it helps our bodies make the Vitamin D necessary for our overall health. However, too much sun exposure can put us at risk for skin cancer, one of the most common and preventable forms of cancer.

**Wear Sunscreen:** Make sure to choose a broad spectrum sunscreen that protects against both UVA and UVB rays, with an SPF of at least 15.

**Limit Exposed Skin:** Cover up with broad brimmed hats, long sleeves, pants and sunglasses. Be aware that most skin cancers occur on the head and neck because of constant sun exposure; pay careful attention to cover these areas.

**Avoid Peak Radiation Hours:** The sun rays are strongest between 10am and 4pm. Avoid direct sun during these hours; try to stay in shady areas instead.

**Pass Up Tanning Beds:** There is no such thing as a safe tan. Tanning beds cause direct and speedy damage to skin, greatly increasing the risk of skin cancer.

According to recent studies, only 5% of cancers are hereditary. That means lifestyle choices can drastically affect our risk of developing certain types of cancer. What can you do to make your day a little healthier?

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## More Cancer Prevention Strategies...

**Exercise Regularly:** Being active can decrease the risk of developing some forms of cancer. Engaging in activity also contributes to maintaining a healthy weight, another important factor in reducing cancer risk. Being obese or overweight can increase the risk of developing cancers of the breast, stomach, kidneys, and esophagus.

**Get Started:** Create exercise appointments for yourself a few times a week, engaging in any enjoyable activity that increases your heart rate.

**Recruit Activity Partners:** Whether it is a family member, friend, neighbor, coworker, or even the family dog, people who exercise with others are more likely to stick with their exercise program.

**Keep Challenging Yourself:** As your endurance and stamina improve, you will need to increase the days and time that you spend exercising. Aim to get up to at least 30 minutes, 5 days each week of moderately intense exercise.

**Stay Motivated:** Keep yourself interested by setting goals or introducing variety. Sign up for a 5K, try a new dance class, find a new route to bike to work, have an indoor exercise plan for poor weather. Just keep moving!

**Maintain a Healthy Diet:** Studies have shown a link between a healthy diet and a reduced rate of developing cancer. In addition, replacing highly caloric foods with nutrient dense, low calorie foods can significantly help with weight management, something that we already know is important for reducing cancer risk. Here are some tips for healthy eating:

**Eat More Produce:** The more fruits and vegetables we can fit into our diets, the better. Aim for a variety of colors to increase the variety of nutrients.

**Increase Whole Foods:** In addition to fruits and vegetables, there is a variety of nutrition rich plant sources that can boost overall health. Some examples are whole grains, legumes, nuts, and seeds.

**Limit Alcohol:** Excessive alcohol consumption is linked to cancers of the mouth, esophagus, breast, and liver. Limit alcohol intake to 2 drinks per day if you are a man and 1 drink per day if you are a woman.

**Start Small:** Eating habits do not change overnight.

**Make small changes:** include a piece of fruit at breakfast, have a side of beans rather than a biscuit, munch on carrots or a small handful of nuts rather than chips.

## Get Screened

Although getting screened may not protect against cancer, early detection is the best way to increase the success of cancer treatments and decrease mortality rates.

**Know Your Family History:** A family history of certain types of cancers may put you at a higher risk of developing those cancers. Let your physician know, so he or she can determine when your screenings should start.

**Get Immunized:** Some cancers can be prevented through virus immunization shots. Talk to your doctor about vaccines for Hepatitis B and HPV and find out if they are right for you.

**Screenings:** Make sure you are regularly screened for cancers of the skin, mouth, colon and rectum. Women should also have regular pelvic exams, along with mammograms after the age of 40. Men should have testicular exams, as well as prostate exams after the age of 50.



<http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/cancer-prevention/CA00024>  
<http://www.preventcancer.org/>  
<http://www.webmd.com/cancer/understanding-cancer-prevention>

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