
Why Cancer Prevention is a Weighty Health Issue

It may not surprise you to learn that healthy eating, exercise and maintaining your optimum weight can prevent around a third of cancers.

And yet a recent survey has shown that a massive 50 per cent of people are still not aware that being overweight is a cause of cancer.

So what can you do to keep yourself healthy? We reveal the simple steps everyone can take to keep cancer at bay.

RESEARCH has shown that fat cells release hormones which can increase the risk of cancer.

And yet, despite this shocking fact, it seems most of us don't want to face up to the reality.

A recent survey commissioned by World Cancer Research Fund (WCRF) found that 50 per cent of people are not aware that being overweight is a cause of cancer.

"We still have a long way to go in terms of getting across the message that people can make a real difference to their cancer risk," says Lisa Cooney, head of education for WCRF.

"If people are not aware of what they can do to reduce their chances of developing cancer then they are not in a position to make informed choices about how they live their lives."

This is Cancer Prevention Week, and the aim has been to increase awareness of how people can reduce their chances of cancer.

"Very often eating healthily does not mean radically changing your diet," says Lisa.

"It is not about reinventing the wheel, but about increasing the number of plant-based foods in your diet, with the aim of eating at least five portions of fruit and vegetables a day, and decreasing the amount of red and processed meat in your diet.

"People should also aim to limit the amount of salt and alcohol they consume.

"Scientists now believe that after not smoking, maintaining a healthy body weight is the most important step you can take to reduce cancer risk."

You should aim to be towards the lower end of the healthy weight range for your gender and your height, as excess body fat is a cause of six different types of cancer - including bowel cancer and post-menopausal breast cancer.

"Scientists believe there are several reasons for the link between body fat and cancer risk. One example is the relationship between excess fat and the hormonal balance in the body. Research has shown that fat cells release hormones such as oestrogen, which increases the risk of cancers such as breast cancer.

"Studies have also shown that fat, particularly if it is stored around the waist, encourages the body to produce substances known as growth hormones. Having high levels of these hormones is linked to a greater risk of cancer.

"You don't have to be going to the gym every day to count yourself as physically active," Lisa adds.

"Everyday activities such as brisk walking, cycling, sweeping or vacuuming all count towards your daily total."

Being physically active reduces the risk of colon cancer and probably helps prevent post-menopausal breast cancer and womb cancer, say researchers.

Types of cancer and the measures you can take to reduce the risk of becoming a victim.

PREVENTING BREAST CANCER

BREAST CANCER is the most common cancer in the UK. Each year more than 44,000 women are diagnosed with breast cancer, that's more than 100 women a day, according to Cancer Research UK.

Cut back on alcohol - drinking as little as one pint of beer or one glass of wine a day increases risk of breast cancer by more than 7 per cent.

Lose weight - obesity increases risk of post-menopausal breast cancer by up to 30 per cent.

Get moving - a more active lifestyle reduces breast cancer risk, as does breastfeeding.

PREVENTING BOWEL CANCER

CUT back on red meat - there is convincing evidence that eating red and processed meat and being overweight increases the risk of bowel cancer - the third most common cancer after breast and lung.

Cut back on alcohol - drinking alcohol may increase bowel cancer dangers too.

Get fit - regular physical activity reduces your risk.

Eat healthily - eat garlic, plenty of fruit and veg, and food containing fibre, and up your intake of fish and milk.

PREVENTING PROSTATE CANCER

PROSTATE cancer is the second most common cause of cancer death in UK men, after lung cancer.

Watch your fats - studies suggest that alpha-linolenic acid (found in animal fat, vegetable oils and nuts) is associated with a heightened risk. Linolenic acid, found in vegetable oils, protects against prostate cancer.

Cut back on red meat - research has found processed and red meats can increase your chances of getting the disease.

Up your tomato intake - evidence indicates there's a significant risk reduction for men who eat a lot of cooked tomato products.

PREVENTING BLADDER CANCER

BLADDER cancer is common in the UK, with more than 10,000 new cases a year. It accounts for one in every 27 new cases of cancer each year and is more common in men than women.

Stop smoking - cigarettes are the most preventable risk factor.

Get fruity - a higher intake of fruit may protect you too. An increase in fruit consumption of 100 grams a day is estimated to reduce risk by approximately 20 per cent.

Cut back on coffee - European studies show that heavy coffee consumption (more than 10 cups per day) may increase the risk of bladder cancer, so cut down on the caffeine.

PREVENTING OTHER CANCERS

CANCER of the mouth, pharynx and larynx:

Evidence suggests that drinking alcohol increases the risk of this type of cancer. You can probably reduce the likelihood of developing it by eating more fruit and vegetables.

Cancer of the oesophagus: Being overweight and drinking alcohol increases risk of cancer of the oesophagus, evidence shows. You are also advised to reduce your risk by eating more fruit and vegetables.

Cancer of the endometrium (womb) and kidney cancer: Excess body fat can cause this type of cancer. You'll cut your risk with regular physical activity.

Top 10 tips

On preventing cancer

1 BE as lean as possible without becoming underweight.

2 BE physically active for at least 30 minutes every day.

3 AVOID sugary drinks. Limit consumption of energy-dense foods (particularly processed foods high in added sugar, low in fibre or high in fat).

4 EAT more of a variety of vegetables, fruits, wholegrains and pulses such as beans.

5 LIMIT consumption of red meats (beef, pork and lamb) and avoid processed meats.

6 IF consumed at all, limit alcoholic drinks to two for men and one for women per day.

7 LIMIT consumption of salty foods and food processed with salt (sodium).

8 DON'T use supplements to protect against cancer.

9 MOTHERS should breastfeed their babies exclusively for up to six months and then add other liquids and foods.

10 AFTER treatment, cancer survivors should follow the recommendations for cancer prevention.

Always remember - do not smoke.

* For more information on cancer prevention visit www.wcrf-uk.org or call 020 7343 4205 Cancer Prevention Week runs until Sunday, May 18.





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