

A Healthy Diet and Physical Activity Can Help Reduce Your Cancer Risk

This patient information sheet contains advice from the American Cancer Society about how good nutrition and physical activity can help you reduce your risk of cancer.

How Can I Use These Guidelines?

If you aren't already following our advice and want to make changes, remember that it's OK to start slowly. Small steps can add up to big changes!

Get to and Stay at a Healthy Weight Throughout Your Life

- If you are overweight or obese, losing even a few pounds can lower your risk for some forms of cancer (and other serious health problems).
- The best way to get and stay leaner is to combine a healthy diet with plenty of physical activity. Aim for the right weight by learning about your body mass index (BMI). Even if you don't reach your ideal weight, eating well and being active can improve your health, help you feel better, and help protect you against cancer.

The Right Weight

Knowing your BMI can tell you if your weight is healthy for someone of your height. You can find your BMI by using a simple chart, such as the one online at cancer.org (search for "BMI calculator"), or by asking your doctor.

Move More and Sit Less

Physical activity can lower your risk of several types of cancer by helping you get to and stay at a healthy weight and by affecting the levels of some hormones that contribute to cancer formation. Long periods of sitting can have the opposite effects.

Move More

- **Adults:** Get at least 150 minutes of moderate activity or 75 minutes of vigorous activity each week. More activity is even better, and 300 or more minutes of moderate activity

(or 150 or more minutes of vigorous activity) is ideal. You can also choose a combination of moderate and vigorous activities—1 minute of vigorous activity can take the place of 2 minutes of moderate activity. For example, 150 minutes of moderate activity, 75 minutes of vigorous activity, and a combination of 100 minutes of moderate activity plus 25 minutes of vigorous activity count as the same amount.

- **Children and teens:** Get at least 1 hour of moderate or vigorous activity each day.

Sit Less

- Spend less time sitting or lying down while engaged in screen-based entertainment. This includes looking at your phone, computer, or TV. Avoid long periods of sitting or lying down.

Have Fun and Be Fit

- You can be active by walking briskly, swimming, gardening, doing housework, or even dancing! Practical activities like walking or biking as transportation instead of driving also count as physical activity.
- If you have children, grandchildren, or pets, be active with them.
- Table 1 shows some examples of moderate and vigorous activities.

Follow a Healthy Eating Pattern, With an Emphasis on Plant Sources

A healthy eating pattern includes:

- Foods high in vitamins, minerals, and other nutrients;
- Foods that are not high in calories and that help you get to and stay at a healthy body weight;
- A colorful variety of vegetables—dark green, red, and orange;
- Fiber-rich beans and peas;
- A colorful variety of fruits; and
- Whole grains (in bread, pasta, etc) and brown rice.

TABLE 1. Examples of Moderate-Intensity and Vigorous-Intensity Aerobic Physical Activities

	MODERATE-INTENSITY AEROBIC ACTIVITIES	VIGOROUS-INTENSITY AEROBIC ACTIVITIES
Exercise and leisure	Walking, dancing, leisurely bicycling, ice and roller skating, horseback riding, canoeing, yoga	Jogging or running, fast bicycling, circuit weight training, swimming, jumping rope, aerobic dance, martial arts
Sports	Downhill skiing, golfing, volleyball, softball, baseball, badminton, doubles tennis	Cross-country skiing, soccer, field or ice hockey, lacrosse, singles tennis, racquetball, basketball
Home activities	Mowing the lawn, general yard and garden maintenance	Digging, carrying and hauling, masonry, carpentry
Occupational activity	Walking and lifting as part of the job (custodial work, farming, auto or machine repair)	Heavy manual labor (forestry, construction, firefighting)

A healthy eating pattern limits or does not include:

- Red meats like beef, pork, and lamb;
- Processed meats like bacon, sausage, luncheon meats, and hot dogs;
- Sugar-sweetened beverages, including soft drinks, sports drinks, and fruit drinks; and
- Highly processed foods and refined grain products.

Tips for a Healthy Eating Pattern

- Fill most of your plate with colorful vegetables and fruits, beans, and whole grains.
- Choose fish, poultry, or beans as your main sources of protein instead of red meat or processed meats.
- If you eat red or processed meats, eat smaller portions.

More Healthy Eating Tips

- Prepare meat, poultry, and fish by baking, broiling, or poaching rather than by frying or charbroiling.
- Follow a healthy eating pattern when you eat away from home. Eat vegetables, whole fruits, and other low-calorie foods instead of high-calorie foods such as French fries, potato and other chips, ice cream, doughnuts, and other sweets. Restaurants often serve large portions, but you don't have to eat it all in one sitting. Ask for a to-go box from the start, and pack up your leftovers for lunch or dinner the next day.
- Don't supersize your plate—and yourself! If you enjoy some high-calorie foods once in a while, eat smaller portions.
- Be a savvy consumer. Pay attention to food labels in the grocery store and on restaurant menus.
- Limit your use of creamy sauces, dressings, and dips with vegetables and fruits.

It Is Best Not to Drink Alcohol

- If you do drink alcohol, limit yourself to no more than 1 drink per day for women or 2 per day for men.
- A drink is 12 ounces of regular beer, 5 ounces of wine, or 1.5 ounces of 80-proof distilled spirits.
- All types of drinks with alcohol increase your risk of cancer and other health problems. It doesn't matter whether you choose beer, white or red wine, or mixed drinks.

Help Create Healthy and Active Communities

Any change you try to make for a healthier lifestyle is easier when you live, work, play, or go to school in a community that supports healthy behaviors. Look for ways to make your community a healthier place to live.

- Ask for healthier meal and snack choices at school or work. Support stores and restaurants that sell or serve healthy options.
- Help make your community an easier place to walk, bike, and enjoy a variety of physical activities. Speak up at city council and other community meetings about the need for sidewalks, bike lanes, parks, and playgrounds.

This information is based on the 2020 ACS Guideline for Diet and Physical Activity for Cancer Prevention. For more details, visit the American Cancer Society website at cancer.org. The guideline article for health professionals is available at bit.ly/ACSdiet-activity2020. ■

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