Canadian Cancer Society
Société canadienne du cancer

Monthly Tips to Reduce Your Risk of Cancer

Gradual changes for eating better and being active




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Changing habits is easier when you do it gradually

This guide provides 12 simple suggestions for reducing your risk of cancer by eating right and being active. Each is backed up by 5 useful tips.

About 1/3 of all cancers can be prevented by eating well, being active and maintaining a healthy body weight. That's pretty good. All the advice here is based on current research. Chances are you've heard much of it.

Maybe you've even tried making these changes in the past. If so, you know that 12 habits is a lot of change to make – when you try it all at once.

Instead, try making the changes gradually. Add one each month, knowing you can't always be perfect. Use this guide to chart your progress. It could add years to your life.

Monthly tips

Eat more vegetables and fruit

Enjoying a variety of vegetables and fruit instead of higher-fat, higher-calorie foods helps you have a healthy body weight. This is good because being overweight or obese increases your risk of cancer. Think of veg and fruit as natural convenience foods. Bananas, apples and oranges all come in their own packaging and can be eaten on the go. So can most raw vegetables.

Try a veggie version of your favourite pasta, pizza or curry.

TIPS

Week 1

Change it up. Fresh, frozen or canned – it's all good. The key is variety.

Week 2

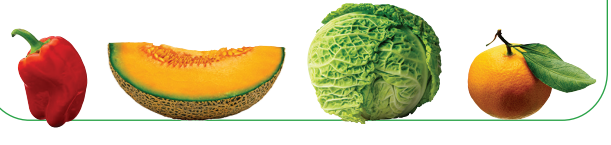
Go for a rainbow of colour. Different coloured veg and fruit provide different nutrients.

Week 3

Read labels. Buy frozen and canned veg and fruit that are low in added salt and sugar.

Week 4

Carry veg and fruit as satisfying, crunchy snacks instead of buying sugary or salty treats.



Month 02

Eat less red meat, and avoid processed meat

Red meats are beef, pork, lamb and goat. Processed meats include ham, bacon, salami, hot dogs and sausages. If your diet includes processed meat or is high in red meat, your risk of colorectal cancer goes up. It also makes it hard to have a healthy body weight, increasing your overall cancer risk.

Bonus tip

Eat vegetarian 1 day a week.

TIPS

Week 1

Limit red meat to 3 servings a week. 1 serving is 85 grams (3 ounces) cooked.

Week 2

When cooking chili or stew, replace half the meat quantity with legumes such as kidney beans or chickpeas.

Week 3

Save processed meats for occasions – like "holiday ham" or "ballpark hot dogs."

Week 4

Expand your pizza options. Instead of pepperoni, try chicken or mushrooms.

Month 03

Eat lots of fibre

Fibre – it's about more than just your breakfast cereal. Fibre is the part of vegetables, fruit and plants (like whole grains and legumes) that your body cannot digest. It helps your digestive system work well. A high-fibre diet protects against colorectal cancer. It also reduces your risk of many other cancers because it helps you have a healthy body weight.

TIPS

Week 1

Start to read food labels. Aim to get between 21 and 38 grams of fibre each day.

Week 2

Choose foods made with whole grains rather than refined white flour.

Week 3

Add cooked lentils to pasta sauce, lasagna or soup.

Week 4

Sprinkle raw pumpkin seeds on cereal, salad or yogurt.

Bonus tip

Leave the skins on when boiling potatoes for mash or curries.

Move more

Aim for 30 minutes of moderate daily activity that gets your heart going. It reduces your risk of colorectal cancer and may reduce your risk of other types too. You'll also feel less stressed, more productive and relaxed. Try walking briskly, raking leaves or shovelling snow. Strength activities are important too. They help your muscles and bones stay strong. It could be lifting weights, groceries or your kids (or grandkids) up to bed!

Walk or bike with your kids to school or activities. Soon it'll be their routine too.

TIPS

Week 1

If it's been a while, check with your doctor before starting. Then start small.

Week 2

Make exercise the "me time" you crave. Joining with others helps you keep at it.

Week 3

Build it into your routine – cycle or walk to work, or simply park 3 blocks away.

Week 4

Take the stairs whenever you can.

Limit alcohol

Drinking any alcohol – beer, wine or spirits – raises your risk of cancer. The less you drink, the more you reduce your risk. Keep it to less than 1 drink a day for women and less than 2 drinks a day for men.

One drink is:

- 350 mL (12 oz) bottle of beer (5% alcohol)
- 145 mL (5 oz) glass of wine (12% alcohol)
- 45 mL (1.5 oz) shot of spirits (40% alcohol)

TIPS

Week 1

Set reasonable goals. Unfair all-or-nothing thinking makes failing easy.

Week 2

Don't eat salty snacks while you drink – they'll make you drink more.

Week 3

Stop drinking on certain days of the week or before the evening.

Week 4

Don't smoke. Tobacco and alcohol together are worse for you than either solo.

Tell others your goals. You're more likely to succeed if they're public.

Month 06

Have a healthy body weight

You're halfway through your year of change. As you've changed your eating habits and started to move more, has your weight started to change for the better? Being overweight or obese increases your risk of cancer. So reducing your weight can reduce your risk. It sounds simple – but ask anyone who's ever tried. It's not easy. Try adding one of these tips each week this month.

TIPS

Week 1

Talk to your doctor about your ideal weight. Everyone's different.

Week 2

Use smaller plates. Trick your brain to think you're eating more!

Week 3

Record all you eat in a journal. You'll learn a lot and may start eating less.

Week 4

Swap 30 minutes of screen time every day for a 30-minute walk.

Bonus tip

Dance to your favourite tune every morning. Moving burns calories!

Month 07

Sit less

Even if you exercise regularly, sitting for long periods may increase your risk of cancer. Do you work at a desk? You may feel you can't do much about this risk – but there are ways around it. The key, again, is to build it into your regular routine.

Bonus tip

Schedule walking meetings when the weather is good.

TIPS

Week 1

Take hourly breaks from sitting. Set an alarm, then stand and stretch.

Week 2

Walk to a co-worker's space to discuss issues instead of phoning or emailing.

Week 3

Circle the room instead of sitting while on the phone or watching TV.

Week 4

Invite co-workers or a friend to join you for a brisk walk after lunch.

Month 08

Avoid processed foods when possible

We all end up choosing them now and then. Processed foods are everywhere! Sure, packaging and processing can help preserve foods and keep them safe to eat, but watch for hidden fat, calories, sugar and salt.

Bonus tip

Ask your employer or school to offer healthier cafeteria choices.

TIPS

Week 1

Always turn the bright packaging around to read the dull nutrition labels.

Week 2

When there's no other option, choose the healthiest by comparing ingredients.

Week 3

Avoid products with ingredients you don't recognize.

Week 4

Balance a pre-packaged meal with ready-cut vegetables.

Month 09

Limit salt and sugar

Eating too much salt and salty food may increase your risk of stomach cancer. Our bodies need salt but Canadians generally get too much! Eating sugary foods makes it more likely you'll put on weight, which increases your risk of cancer. Read nutrition labels carefully. You'll find extra sugar all over, including in some sauces and condiments like ketchup and relish. Salt is nearly everywhere too. Even breakfast cereals have it.

TIPS

Week 1

Choose foods that are low in salt (or sodium). If the label says it's 5% or less, that's low!

Week 2

Check labels for added sugars, from glucose and honey to corn syrup and fructose.

Week 3

Remove the saltshaker and sugar bowl from your table.

Week 4

Eat preserved food, like pickled foods and salted fish and meats, less often.

Bonus tip

Choose water over soft drinks and juices.

Month 10 — Be careful about fat

High-fat foods can increase weight, and being overweight increases your risk of cancer. Unsaturated fat is a healthier fat. It's in avocados, nuts, seeds, non-hydrogenated soft margarines and oils like olive oil. Saturated and trans fats are less healthy. Saturated fats are in animal sources of food, like meat, poultry, butter and cheese, plus tropical oils like coconut, palm and palm kernel. Trans fats are in foods made with or cooked in partially hydrogenated fat.

Bonus tip

Replace sour cream with plain yogurt when mixing it with other foods.

TIPS

Week 1

Choose lean cuts of meat, then trim off visible fat. Remove skin from poultry.

Week 2

Cook with less fat. Bake, poach or steam instead of frying food.

Week 3

Use a measuring spoon when cooking with oil instead of pouring from the bottle.

Week 4

Try eating toast and sandwiches without butter or margarine. Soon you won't miss it.

Month 11 — Limit BBQ, broiling and frying

This suggestion is hard for a lot of us to hear. However, research shows that cooking meat, poultry and fish at high temperatures (by frying, broiling or barbecuing – especially when well done or charred) creates chemicals that may increase your risk of cancer.

TIPS

Week 1

Marinate meat, poultry and fish in vinegar or lemon juice and your favourite herbs before cooking. This reduces the formation of the chemicals that may cause cancer.

Week 2

Learn the joys of slow cooking. You'll save on cheaper cuts of meat!

Week 3

Skewer a kebab – smaller cuts of meat cook faster, which means less time for chemicals to form.

Week 4

Trim off visible fat, including the skin on poultry, to avoid flare-ups on the grill.

Bonus tip

Get your BBQ fix by grilling vegetables, veggie burgers and fruit slices.

Be a smart consumer

Evidence about connections between certain foods and cancer is still emerging. Meaning? Don't trust all you hear or see. Advertisers are trying to sell you their products just as the media is trying to sell you a story. One study may link a certain food to reducing your risk for cancer, while others don't.

TIPS

Week 1

Shop with a grocery list so you don't get influenced by packaging. Take this guide with you for extra help!

Week 2

Beware of most health claims on packaging. "Low fat" could really mean "more sugar added."

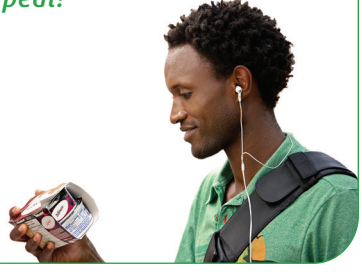
Week 3

Read nutrition labels. Anything over 15% of your daily value of a nutrient is high. High in fibre is good, but high in sodium isn't.

Week 4

Get health info from your doctor, the government and other reliable sources.

Go back to Month 01 and repeat!



Learn more about reducing your risk by eating well and getting active.

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- Email us at **info@cis.cancer.ca**.
- Visit our website at **cancer.ca**.
- Visit your local Canadian Cancer Society office.

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The Canadian Cancer Society fights cancer by:

- doing everything we can to prevent cancer
- funding research to outsmart cancer
- empowering, informing and supporting Canadians living with cancer
- advocating for public policies to improve the health of Canadians
- rallying Canadians to get involved in the fight against cancer

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