



[Home](#) → [Medical Encyclopedia](#) → Diet and cancer

URL of this page: //medlineplus.gov/ency/article/002096.htm

Diet and cancer

Diet can have an impact on your risk of developing many types of cancer. You can reduce your overall risk by following a healthy diet that includes plenty of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.

Information

DIET AND BREAST CANCER

The link between nutrition and breast cancer has been well studied. To reduce risk of breast cancer the American Cancer Society (ACS) recommends that you:

- Get regular physical activity of moderate intensity for at least 30 minutes a day 5 times a week.
- Maintain a healthy weight throughout life.
- Eat a diet rich in fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. Consume at least 2½ cups (300 grams) of fruits and vegetables daily.
- Limit alcoholic beverages to no more than 2 drinks/day for men; 1 drink/day for women. One drink is the equivalent of 12 ounces (360 milliliters) beer, 1 ounce (30 milliliters) spirits, or 5 ounces (150 milliliters) wine.

Other things to consider:

- Data on the role of high soy intake (in the form of supplements) is inconclusive regarding hormone-sensitive cancers in women. Consuming a diet that contains moderate amounts of soy foods before adulthood may be beneficial.
- Breastfeeding may reduce a mother's risk of developing breast or ovarian cancer.

DIET AND PROSTATE CANCER

The ACS recommends the following lifestyle choices to reduce prostate cancer risk:

- Get regular physical activity of moderate intensity for at least 30 minutes a day five times a week.
- Maintain a healthy weight throughout life.
- Eat a diet rich in fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. Consume at least 2½ cups (300 grams) of fruits and vegetables daily.
- Limit alcoholic beverages to no more than 2 drinks/day for men. One drink is the equivalent of 12 ounces (360 milliliters) beer, 1 ounce (30 milliliters) spirits, or 5 ounces (150 milliliters) wine.

Other things to consider:

- Your health care provider may suggest that men limit their use of calcium supplements and not exceed the recommended amount of calcium from foods and beverages.

DIET AND COLON OR RECTAL CANCER

The ACS recommends the following to reduce colorectal cancer risk:

- Limit intake of red and processed meat. Avoid charbroiling meat.
- Eat a diet rich in fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. Consume at least 2½ cups (300 grams) of fruits and vegetables daily. Broccoli may be particularly beneficial.
- Avoid excess alcohol consumption.
- Eat recommended amounts of calcium and get enough vitamin D.
- Eat more omega-3 fatty acids (fatty fish, flaxseed oil, walnuts) than omega-6 fatty acids (corn oil, safflower oil, and sunflower oil).
- Maintain a healthy weight throughout life. Avoid obesity and buildup of belly fat.
- Any activity is beneficial but vigorous activity might have an even greater benefit. Increasing the intensity and amount of your physical activity may help reduce your risk.
- Get regular colorectal screenings based on your age and health history.

DIET AND STOMACH OR ESOPHAGEAL CANCER

The ACS recommends the following lifestyle choices to reduce stomach and esophageal cancer risk:

- Eat a diet rich in fruits, vegetables, and whole grains. Consume at least 2½ cups (300 grams) of fruits and vegetables daily.
- Lower your intake of processed meats, smoked, nitrite-cured, and salt-preserved foods; emphasize plant-based proteins.
- Get regular physical activity of at least 30 minutes a day 5 times a week.
- Maintain a healthy body weight throughout life.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CANCER PREVENTION

The American Institute for Cancer Research's 10 recommendations for cancer prevention include:

- Be as lean as possible without becoming underweight.
- Be physically active for at least 30 minutes every day.
- Avoid sugary drinks. Limit consumption of calorie-dense foods. (Artificial sweeteners in moderate amounts have not been shown to cause cancer.)
- Eat more of a variety of vegetables, fruits, whole grains, and legumes such as beans.
- Limit consumption of red meats (such as beef, pork and lamb) and avoid processed meats.
- If consumed at all, limit alcoholic drinks to 2 per day for men and 1 per day for women.
- Limit consumption of salty foods and foods processed with salt (sodium).

- DO NOT use supplements to protect against cancer.
- It is best for mothers to breastfeed exclusively for up to 6 months and then add other liquids and foods.
- After treatment, cancer survivors should follow the recommendations for cancer prevention.

RESOURCES

- Dietary Guidelines for Americans -- www.myplate.gov [<https://www.myplate.gov>]
- The American Cancer Society is an excellent source of information on cancer prevention -- www.cancer.gov/ [<https://www.cancer.gov/>]
- The American Institute for Cancer Research -- www.aicr.org/cancer-prevention/healthy-eating/new-american-plate/ [<https://www.aicr.org/cancer-prevention/healthy-eating/new-american-plate/>]
- The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics provides sound dietary advice on a wide range of topics -- www.eatright.org/ [<https://www.eatright.org/>]
- The National Cancer Institute is a government gateway to the accurate information on cancer prevention -- www.cancer.gov/ [<https://www.cancer.gov/>]

Alternative Names

Fiber and cancer; Cancer and fiber; Nitrates and cancer; Cancer and nitrates

References

Basen-Engquist K, Brown P, Coletta AM, Savage M, Maresso KC, Hawk E. Lifestyle and cancer prevention. In: Niederhuber JE, Armitage JO, Kastan MB, Doroshow JH, Tepper JE, eds. *Abeloff's Clinical Oncology*. 6th ed. Philadelphia, PA: Elsevier; 2020:chap 22.

Kumar V, Abbas AK, Aster JC. Environmental and nutritional diseases. In: Kumar V, Abbas AK, Aster JC, eds. *Robbins and Cotran Pathologic Basis of Disease*. 10th ed. Philadelphia, PA: Elsevier; 2021:chap 9.

National Institutes of Health, National Cancer Institute website. SEER training modules, cancer risk factors. training.seer.cancer.gov/disease/cancer/risk.html [<https://training.seer.cancer.gov/disease/cancer/risk.html>]. Accessed April 20, 2023.

Rock CL, Thomson C, Gansler T, et al. American Cancer Society guideline for diet and physical activity for cancer prevention. *CA Cancer J Clin*. 2020;70(4):245-271. PMID: 32515498
pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32515498/ [<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32515498/>].

Snetselaar LG, de Jesus JM, DeSilva DM, Stody EE. Dietary guidelines for Americans, 2020-2025: understanding the scientific process, guidelines, and key recommendations. *Nutr Today*. 2021;56(6):287-295. PMID: 34987271
www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8713704/ [<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8713704/>].

Review Date 4/13/2023

Updated by: Stefania Manetti, RD/N, CDCES, RYT200, My Vita Sana LLC - Nourish and heal through food, San Jose, CA. Review provided by VeriMed Healthcare Network. Also reviewed by David C. Dugdale, MD, Medical Director, Brenda Conaway, Editorial Director, and the A.D.A.M. Editorial team.

Learn how to cite this page



Health Content
Provider
06/01/2028

A.D.A.M., Inc. is accredited by URAC, for Health Content Provider (www.urac.org). URAC's [accreditation program](#) is an independent audit to verify that A.D.A.M. follows rigorous standards of quality and accountability. A.D.A.M. is among the first to achieve this important distinction for online health information and services. Learn more about A.D.A.M.'s [editorial policy](#), [editorial process](#), and [privacy policy](#).

The information provided herein should not be used during any medical emergency or for the diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. A licensed medical professional should be consulted for diagnosis and treatment of any and all medical conditions. Links to other sites are provided for information only – they do not constitute endorsements of those other sites. No warranty of any kind, either expressed or implied, is made as to the accuracy, reliability, timeliness, or correctness of any translations made by a third-party service of the information provided herein into any other language. © 1997-2025 A.D.A.M., a business unit of Ebix, Inc. Any duplication or distribution of the information contained herein is strictly prohibited.



National Library of Medicine 8600 Rockville Pike, Bethesda, MD 20894 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

National Institutes of Health