

Importance of a healthy diet in cancer prevention

by EONS Board member Nikolina Dodlek

An overall healthy dietary pattern has the potential to lower cancer risk by 10-20%. The association between diet and cancer incidence varies by cancer sites and by sex, but the recommended components of a healthy diet are often similar.

How to maintain a healthy weight

In a meta-analysis conducted by the WCRF/AICR, there is convincing evidence that carrying extra fat mass, characterised by a higher body mass index (BMI), greater waist circumference and greater waist-to-hip ratio, significantly increases the risk of several cancers. A BMI between 18.5-25 is classified as normal, 25.1-29.9 overweight, and 30 or higher obese. Each increase of 5 points in BMI was associated with a 5-50% higher risk depending on cancer types (48% higher risk of oesophageal adenocarcinoma, 30% higher risk of kidney cancer, 30% higher risk of liver cancer, 12% higher risk for postmenopausal breast cancer, 10% higher risk of pancreatic cancer, and 5% higher risk of colorectal cancer).



Eat a rainbow every day!

Make fun meals, colourful, rainbow plates. Healthy food is inexpensive and does not take a lot of time to prepare and cook.

Enjoy planning a new menu for you and your family

Experiment with different tastes, experience cooking new foods. A positive approach and motivation is important. Think about the benefit – not the restriction. A little creativity can turn healthy eating into an exciting and enjoyable time. Personalise your meals by also having a variety of food with different textures and shapes. Various easy and readily available nutritious foods, such as fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grain cereals and breads, low fat dairy products – like yoghurt and cheese sticks – are ideal as 'convenience foods' or snacks.

Meal preparation can be turned into a fun family activity! Have the whole family participate in making their own healthy snacks or decorating their meal. Allowing children some freedom in their choice of food helps them build healthy eating habits for the future.

There is strong evidence that eating whole grains and foods containing dietary fibre protects against colorectal cancer, weight gain and obesity.

The evidence shows that alcoholic drinks of all types have a similar impact on cancer risk. Every 10 grammes of alcohol consumed per day elevates risk by 4-25%.

Fast foods such as burgers, fried chicken, french fries and high-calorie drinks (containing sugar, such as soda; or unhealthy fats, such as shakes) are not healthy for our bowel.



ABCD Healthy Diet Planning Principles

- **A**dequate
 - Nutrient amounts sufficient to maintain health
- **B**alance
 - Foods proportionate to each other and body's needs
- **C**alorie control
 - Maintain healthy weight
- **Moderation**: Enough but not too much

ABC of healthy diet

In conclusion, a healthy, balanced diet is a hugely important factor in preventing a number of cancers. A poor diet and being overweight or obese hugely increases the risk of developing cancer, as well as a significant cohort of other medical conditions. Understanding how to manage cravings, 'food weaknesses' and how to create a healthy, balanced diet is important in overall wellness, enjoyment of life and increased energy levels. Seek support and professional advice if needed to provide relevant information to maintain balance in everyday life. Never feel ashamed to ask for advice.

Literature:

1. WHO – International Agency for Research on Cancer. "Latest global cancer data: Cancer burden rises to 18.1 million new cases and 9.6 million cancer deaths in 2018." <https://www.who.int/cancer/PRGlobocanFinal.pdf>
2. World Cancer Research Fund/American Institute for Cancer Research. Continuous Update Project Expert Report 2018. "[Body fatness and weight gain and the risk of cancer.](#)"
3. Grosso G, Bella F, Godos J, Sciacca S, Del Rio D, Ray S, Galvano F, Giovannucci EL. Possible role of diet in cancer: Systematic review and multiple meta-analyses of dietary patterns, lifestyle factors, and cancer risk. *Nutrition reviews*. 2017 Jun 1;75(6):405-19.
4. World Cancer Research Fund/American Institute for Cancer Research. Continuous Update Project Expert Report 2018. "[Diet, nutrition, physical activity and breast cancer survivors.](#)"