

CANCER

Joan Kortbein, Registered Dietitian, Certified Diabetes Educator



One of the most dreaded words for people can be “cancer.” It is the second leading cause of death in the United States – second only to heart disease. The American Cancer Society reports a steady decline in cancer death rates since 1991 – with record decline from 2016-2018. It has been reported that nearly 18% of all cancers can be linked to lifestyle choices – namely diet and activity.

The American Institute for Cancer Research has introduced the “New American Plate 2/3 – 1/3 Model” to educate the public on ways to lower cancer risk along with other health conditions including heart disease and diabetes. The plate is 2/3 plant-based foods and 1/3 animal-based proteins such as fish, poultry and dairy foods with lean red meats up to three times a week.

Eat more of:

Fruits (especially berries and citrus) – strawberries, blueberries, raspberries, oranges, apples, pears, etc...
Vegetables (especially dark green and orange colored) – broccoli, spinach, kale, Brussel sprouts, carrots, sweet potatoes, etc...
Whole grains – Whole wheat breads, crackers and pasta; brown rice, wild rice, quinoa
Beans & lentils – black beans, Northern beans, pinto beans, chick peas

Eat less of:

Red meat (beef, pork, lamb) <i>Limit to 3 portions a week or total of 12-18 ounces per week.</i>	Strong evidence linked with colorectal cancers. Limited evidence linked with lung, pancreatic and nasopharyngeal cancers.
Processed meat (bacon, sausage, salami, hot dogs, lunch meat, etc)	Strong evidence linked with colorectal cancer. Limited evidence linked with lung, pancreatic, stomach, esophageal and nasopharyngeal cancers.
Alcohol (see below for more) – 12 oz. beer, 5 oz. wine or 1.5 oz 80-proof alcohol. <i>Limit 2 drinks/day for men; 1 drink/day for women.</i>	Strong evidence linked with breast, colorectal, esophageal, liver, mouth and stomach cancers. Limited evidence linked with lung and pancreatic cancers.

Healthy Weight

Maintaining a healthy weight reduces your risk for several major health conditions like heart disease, diabetes and cancer. Carrying extra fat tissue can increase your risk for at

least 12 different cancers in adults including breast (primarily in women past menopause), endometrial, esophageal, pancreatic, colon and rectal, liver and kidney cancers. Maintaining a healthy weight is the second most important thing you can do to lower your cancer risk – the number one thing is to not use tobacco products.

Limit Alcohol

According to the American Cancer Society, about 6% of cancers in the United States are linked to alcohol consumption. The risk is thought to come from the alcohol (ethanol) itself, so it doesn't matter whether you are drinking beer or wine; even red wine that is said to offer some heart healthy compounds will increase cancer risk. If you drink alcohol and smoke tobacco together, your risk for mouth, throat, voice box and esophagus cancer is even higher as the alcohol can act as a carrier for harmful chemicals from the tobacco to get into your cells.

Move

Being active is another lifestyle factor that can reduce your risk for many health conditions such as heart disease, diabetes and high blood pressure in addition to cancer. Exercise can help manage weight, reduce insulin resistance to ultimately lower insulin levels in your body that can stimulate cancer growth.

Adults are recommended to be moderately active 150-300 minutes a week, 75-150 minutes of vigorous activity a week or a combination of the two. The recommendation for children is to be active about 60 minutes every day. Moderate activity includes a brisk walk, biking or even housework and gardening if the activity is sustained. Vigorous activity is defined as anything that uses your large muscle groups and increases heart rate and breathing. But even if you feel you can't achieve those levels, increasing your activity at any level can improve your health. I have said it before...don't let what you can't do, keep you from doing what you can do!

Check out the American Institute for Cancer Research's “Healthy 10 Challenge”, which is a free 10-week interactive online program to help with lifestyle modifications to lower your risk for cancer at www.aicr.org.

