

31 Simple Ways to Prevent Cancer

Small changes to inoculate yourself against cancer.

Consider this number: 10 million. That's how many cases of cancer are diagnosed worldwide each year. Now consider this number: 15 million. That's how many cases of cancer the World Health Organization estimates will be diagnosed in the year 2020 -- a 50 percent increase -- if we don't get our act together.

Most cancers don't develop overnight or out of nowhere. Cancer is largely predictable, the end result of a decades-long process, but just a few simple changes in your daily life can significantly reduce your risk. Here are 31 great tips.

1. Serve sauerkraut at your next picnic. A Finnish study found that the fermentation process involved in making sauerkraut produces several other cancer-fighting compounds, including ITCs, indoles, and sulforaphane. To reduce the sodium content, rinse canned or jarred sauerkraut before eating.

2. Eat your fill of broccoli, but steam it rather than microwaving it. Broccoli is a cancer-preventing superfood, one you should eat frequently. But take note: A Spanish study found that microwaving broccoli destroys 97 percent of the vegetable's cancer-protective flavonoids. So steam it, eat it raw as a snack, or add it to soups and salads.

3. Toast some Brazil nuts and sprinkle over your salad. They're a rich form of selenium, a trace mineral that convinces cancer cells to commit suicide and helps cells repair their DNA. A Harvard study of more than 1,000 men with prostate cancer found those with the highest blood levels of selenium were 48 percent less likely to develop advanced disease over 13 years than men with the lowest levels. And a dramatic five-year study conducted at Cornell University and the University of Arizona showed that 200 micrograms of selenium daily -- the amount in two unshelled Brazil nuts -- resulted in 63 percent fewer prostate tumors, 58 percent fewer colorectal cancers, 46 percent fewer lung malignancies, and a 39 percent overall decrease in cancer deaths.

4. Pop a calcium supplement with vitamin D. A study out of Dartmouth Medical School suggests that the supplements reduce colon polyps (a risk factor for colon cancer) in people susceptible to the growths.

5. Add garlic to everything you eat. Garlic contains sulfur compounds that may stimulate the immune system's natural defenses against cancer, and may have the potential to reduce tumor growth. Studies suggest that garlic can reduce the incidence of stomach cancer by as much as a factor of 12!

6. Sauté two cloves of crushed garlic in 2 tablespoons of olive oil, then mix in a can of low-sodium, diced tomatoes. Stir gently until heated and serve over whole wheat pasta. We already mentioned the benefits of garlic. The lycopene in the tomatoes protects against colon, prostate, and bladder cancers; the olive oil helps your body absorb the lycopene; and the fiber-filled pasta reduces your risk of colon cancer. As for the benefits of all of these ingredients together: They taste great!

7. Every week, buy a cantaloupe at the grocery store and cut it up after you put away your groceries. Store it in a container and eat several pieces every morning. Cantaloupe is a great source of carotenoids, plant chemicals shown to significantly reduce the risk of lung cancer.

8. Mix half a cup of blueberries into your morning cereal. Blueberries rank number one in terms of their antioxidant power. Antioxidants neutralize free radicals, which are unstable compounds that can damage cells and lead to diseases including cancer.

9. Learn to eat artichokes tonight. Artichokes are a great source of silymarin, an antioxidant that may help prevent skin cancer. To eat these delicious veggies, peel off the tough outer leaves on the bottom, slice the bottom, and cut off the spiky top. Then boil or steam until tender, about 30-45 minutes. Drain. Dip each leaf in a vinaigrette or garlic mayonnaise, then gently tear the fibrous covering off with your front teeth, working your way inward to the tender heart. Once there, gently scoop the bristles from the middle of the heart, dip in a little butter or lemon juice, and enjoy!

10. Coat barbecue food with a thick sauce. Grilling meat can create a variety of cancer-causing chemicals. But researchers from the American Institute for Cancer Research found that coating the meat with a thick marinade and thereby preventing direct contact with the charring flames reduced the amount of such chemicals created. Another tip: Precook your meat in the oven and then throw it on the grill to finish.

11. Every time you go to the bathroom, stop by the kitchen or water cooler for a glass of water. A major study published in *The New England Journal of Medicine* in 1996 found that men who drank six 8-ounce glasses of water every day slashed their risk of bladder cancer in half. Another study linked the amount of water women drank to their risk of colon cancer, with heavy water drinkers reducing their risk up to 45 percent.

12. Take up a tea habit. The healing powers of green tea have been valued in Asia for thousands of years. In the West, new research reveals that it protects against a variety of cancers as well as heart disease. Some scientists believe that a chemical in green tea called EGCG could be one of the most powerful anticancer compounds ever discovered.

13. Have a beer tonight. Beer protects against the bacterium *Helicobacter pylori*, known to cause ulcers and possibly linked to stomach cancer. But don't overdo it. Drinking more than one or two alcoholic drinks a day may increase your risk of mouth, throat, esophageal, liver, and breast cancer.

14. Throw some salmon on the grill tonight. Australian researchers studying Canadians (go figure) found those who ate four or more servings of fish per week were nearly one-third less likely to develop the blood cancers leukemia, myeloma, and non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. Other studies show a link between eating fatty fish (salmon, mackerel, halibut, sardines, and tuna, as well as shrimp and scallops) with a reduced risk of endometrial cancer in women. Ah, those amazing omega-3s at it again!

15. Take a multivitamin every morning. Many studies suggest getting the ideal levels of vitamins and minerals can improve your immune system function and help prevent a variety of cancers.

16. Get about 15 minutes of sunlight on your skin each day. You've heard of the sunshine vitamin, vitamin D haven't you? Turns out we've been so good at heeding advice to slather on sun lotion and avoid the sun's rays that many of us aren't getting enough of this valuable nutrient. Researchers find that getting too little vitamin D may increase your risk of multiple cancers, including breast, colon, prostate, ovarian, and stomach, as well as osteoporosis, diabetes, multiple sclerosis, and high blood pressure.

The best source? Exposure to UVB rays found in natural and artificial sunlight. About 15 minutes a day ought to do it. Avoid overexposure, of course. That can *increase* your risk for cancers of the skin. You can also get vitamin D in your calcium supplement if you choose a supplement that contains both.

17. Carry a shot glass in your beach bag. Then fill it with sunscreen and rub it all over your body. A shot glass holds about 1.5 ounces, which is how much sunscreen dermatologists estimate you need to protect yourself from the cancer-causing UV rays of the sun. Repeat every two hours.

18. Cut a kiwifruit in half, then scoop out the flesh with a spoon. Now eat! Kiwi is a little hand grenade of cancer-fighting antioxidants, including vitamin C, vitamin E, lutein, and copper. You can also rub a couple of cut kiwifruit on a low-fat cut of meat as a tenderizer.

19. Use a condom and stick to one partner. The more sexual partners a woman has, the greater her risk of contracting human papillomavirus, or HPV, which causes cervical cancer. Having an unfaithful husband also increases her risk.

20. Cut out high-fat animal protein. A Yale study found that women who ate the most animal protein had a 70 percent higher risk of developing non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, while those who ate diets high in saturated fat increased their risk 90 percent. So switch to low-fat or nonfat dairy, have poultry or fish instead of beef or pork, and use olive oil instead of butter.

21. Have your partner feed you grapes. They're great sources of resveratrol, the cancer-protecting compound found in wine, but don't have the alcohol of wine, which can increase the risk of breast cancer in women. Plus, the closeness such an activity engenders (we hope) strengthens your immune system.

22. Sprinkle scallions over your salad. A diet high in onions may reduce the risk of prostate cancer 50 percent. But the effects are strongest when they're eaten raw or lightly cooked. So try scallions, Vidalia onions, shallots, or chives for a milder taste.

23. Make a batch of fresh lemonade or limeade. A daily dose of citrus fruits may cut the risk of mouth, throat, and stomach cancers by half, Australian researchers found.

24. Take a 30-minute walk every evening after dinner. That's all it takes to reduce your breast cancer risk, according to a study from the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center in Seattle. Turns out that moderate exercise reduces levels of estrogen, a hormone that contributes to breast cancer. When 170 overweight, couch potato women ages 50-75 did some form of moderate exercise for about three hours a week, levels of circulating estrogen dropped significantly after three months. After a year, those who lost at least 2 percent of their body fat had even greater decreases in estrogen. Another study linked four hours a week of walking or hiking with cutting the risk of pancreatic cancer in half. The benefits are probably related to improved insulin metabolism due to the exercise.

25. Buy organic foods. They're grown without added pesticides or hormones, both of which can cause cellular damage that may eventually lead to cancer.

26. Learn to love dandelions. Using commercial pesticides on your lawn may increase your risk of cancer, since most contain pesticides such as 2,4-D (linked to non-Hodgkin's lymphoma) and MCPP (associated with soft-tissue cancers). Plus, pesticides used solely on lawns don't have to go through the same rigorous testing for long-term health effects as those used on food. And, as *E/The Environmental Magazine* noted in a 2004 article, no federal studies have assessed the safety of lawn-care chemicals in combination, the way most are sold.

27. Buy clothes that don't need to be dry-cleaned. Many dry cleaners still use a chemical called perc (perchloroethylene), found to cause kidney and liver damage and cancer in animals repeatedly exposed through inhalation. Buying clothes that don't require dry cleaning, or hand washing them yourself, can reduce your exposure to this chemical. If you must dry-clean your clothes, take them out of the plastic bag and air them outside or in another room before wearing.

28. Choose cucumbers over pickles, fresh salmon over lox. Studies find that smoked and pickled foods contain various carcinogens.

29. Switch from french fries and potato chips to mashed potatoes and pretzels. A potential cancer-causing compound called acrylamide forms as a result of the chemical changes that occur in foods when they're baked, fried, or roasted. Not surprisingly, many foods with the greatest amounts of acrylamide are also some of the worst-for-you foods, such as french fries, potato chips, and baked sweets. Although the results aren't final yet, Michael Jacobson, Ph.D., executive director of the Center for Science in the Public Interest, estimates acrylamide causes between 1,000 and 25,000 cancers per year. His agency has petitioned the Food and Drug Administration to set limits on the amount of acrylamide foods can contain. The FDA is studying the issue.

30. Go for a spray-on tan. They're available in most tanning salons these days and, unlike tanning beds, there's no evidence that they increase your risk of skin cancer.

31. Call up your bowling pal and hit the lanes. A study from the State University of New York at Stony Brook found that men with high levels of stress and those with less

satisfying contacts with friends and family members had higher levels of prostate-specific antigen (PSA) in their blood, a marker for the development of prostate cancer.