

Eating well for cancer prevention

Some things that raise your risk of cancer, like age or family history, can't be changed. The good news is that there are things you can control, like not smoking, being physically active and eating well.

What should I eat?

Eat more plant foods

Include plant foods such as vegetables, fruits, whole grains, beans, peas and lentils. These foods provide fibre, vitamins, minerals and a natural compound called phytochemicals. To lower your risk of several cancers including colorectal, each day try to eat:

- At least 5 servings of vegetables and fruit
- 30 grams (g) of fibre
 - Visit [HealthLinkBC File #68h: Fibre and your health](#) to find out how much fibre is found in specific foods

Vegetables and fruits

Fill half your plate with colourful vegetables and fruit at each meal. Fresh, frozen or canned fruits and vegetables are all healthy options. Choose non-starchy vegetables more often, such as:

- Broccoli, cauliflower, Brussels sprouts
- Leafy greens
- Onions, garlic and leeks
- Zucchini, pepper

Whole grain foods

Fill a quarter of your plate with a variety of whole grain foods, such as:

- Whole oats or oatmeal
- Whole grain bread
- Whole grain brown or wild rice
- Whole grain pasta
- Buckwheat, farro, quinoa, amaranth

Protein foods

Fill the remaining quarter of your plate with protein foods.

Choose plant-based proteins more often, such as:

- Beans, peas, lentils
- Soybean-based foods like tofu and tempeh
- Nuts, seeds

Healthier animal-based protein foods include:

- Poultry without skin, fish and seafood
- Eggs and lower fat dairy

Cooking meat, fish or poultry at very high temperatures may increase cancer risk. Try these tips to make frying grilling or barbecuing safer:

- Trim off fat
- Marinate meat, fish or poultry before cooking
- Pre-cook before grilling to limit exposure to the flame
- Avoid charring when grilling and flip often

What should I drink?

Make water your drink of choice. Other healthy options include:

- Plain lower fat milk and fortified plant-based beverages such as fortified soy beverage
- Unsweetened coffee and tea

Is there anything I should avoid or limit?

Avoid alcohol

It's best to avoid alcohol. Alcohol increases the risk of at least 6 types of cancer, including breast and colorectal. If you drink, consider limiting your alcohol intake to one or two standard drinks per week as a lower risk option. A standard drink is:

- A bottle of beer or cider (12 oz., 341 ml, 5% alcohol)

- A glass of wine (5 oz., 142 ml, 12% alcohol)
- A shot glass of spirits (1.5 oz., 43 ml, 40% alcohol)

Avoid processed meat

Eating processed meat increases the risk of colorectal cancer. It's best to avoid processed meat such as ham, salami, pepperoni, corned beef, sliced deli meats, bacon and sausages.

If you eat processed meat, enjoy an occasional serving like ham at a holiday dinner or a hot dog at a hockey game.

Limit red meat

Eating red meat can increase the risk of colorectal cancer. Limit your intake of red meat to no more than 350 to 500g of cooked meat each week. This looks like 4-6 decks of cards. Examples include:

- Beef, pork, lamb, goat and wild game

Limit highly processed foods

Highly processed foods are often high in calories and low in nutrients. Eating these foods regularly may lead to a higher amount of body fat, which increases the risk for 13 types of cancer. Many highly processed foods also have a lot of sodium, sugar or saturated fat which can raise your risk of other chronic diseases. Examples of these foods include:

- Sugary drinks, like soft drinks and fruit juice
- Fast foods, like burgers and French fries
- Frozen entrees, like pizza and pasta dishes
- Bakery products, like muffins and donuts
- Sweet and salty snacks, like chips, candy and chocolate

If you eat these foods, eat them less often and in smaller amounts. Use the nutrition facts table to compare products, and choose those that are lower in sodium, sugar and saturated fat.

Should I take supplements?

Avoid taking high-dose supplements for cancer prevention. Supplements are not proven to lower cancer risk and may cause harm. Instead, aim to

eat a well-balanced diet to support your immunity and to get the nutrients your body needs.

Some individuals may benefit from supplements for specific reasons, such as those diagnosed with a nutrient deficiency or who follow a vegan eating pattern. Speak with your health care provider or a dietitian if you're unsure about your need for supplements.

What else can I do to reduce my cancer risk?

Stop smoking

Smoking is the number one cause of cancer. It increases the risk of 12 different cancers. It's never too late to stop smoking. Speak to your health care provider or visit QuitNow.ca to find support and resources available to you.

Be active every day

Regular physical activity lowers your risk for several cancers including colon and breast cancer. Aim for:

- At least 150 minutes of moderate to vigorous aerobic physical activities each week
- Muscle strengthening activities using major muscle groups at least twice a week
- Several hours of light physical activities, including standing
- Limiting sedentary time to 8 hours or less

For more information on or support with physical activity, call **8-1-1** to speak to a qualified exercise professional.

For more information

- Plant-based eating guidelines www.healthlinkbc.ca/sites/default/files/healthy_eating/pdf/plant-based_diet_guidelines.pdf
- BC Cancer: Preventing cancer www.bccancer.bc.ca/prevention
- First Nations Healthy Authority: Cancer prevention www.fnha.ca/what-we-do/healthy-living/cancer/prevention

Call **8-1-1** to speak with a dietitian

For more HealthLinkBC File topics, visit www.HealthLinkBC.ca/health-library/healthlinkbc-files or your local public health unit. For non-emergency health information and advice in B.C. visit www.HealthLinkBC.ca or call **8-1-1** (toll-free). For the deaf and hard of hearing, call **7-1-1**. Translation services are available in more than 130 languages on request.