

**CANCER PREVENTION IS WON
THROUGH DAILY CHOICES**



Let Your Lifestyle Be Your Anti-Cancer Prescription

Embracing a healthy lifestyle and making wise choices are pivotal in reducing the risk of developing cancer. Nurturing the body with nutritious foods, engaging in regular exercise and maintaining a balanced weight, significantly increase your overall well-being. As you expand your knowledge on factors that can impact cancer risk, take charge by making healthy choices that begin in your own household.

Here are seven action steps you can take today!

✓ **Avoid tobacco, especially secondhand smoke as much as possible**

Secondhand smoke is the smoke exhaled by a smoker or released from the burning end of a tobacco product. Non-smokers exposed to secondhand smoke have an increased risk of lung cancer, heart disease, respiratory problems, and other cancers. Tobacco use is linked to various types of cancer, including mouth, throat, esophageal, bladder, kidney, pancreatic and cervical cancer. Toxic tobacco chemicals can damage DNA and form cancerous cells. Smoking cessation resources are available through [Magellan EAP](#).

✓ **Protect your skin by using UV protection like sunscreen or limit time in direct sunlight**

UV radiation weakens the skin's immune system, making it more susceptible to infections, allergic reactions, and other skin disorders. Protecting your skin from UV rays, helps maintain the natural barrier function, keeping it healthier and less prone to irritations and infections. If you notice anything abnormal, obtaining a specialist referral to a dermatologist is available through your PCP.

✓ **Limit alcohol intake, get creative with non-alcoholic alternatives in social outings**

Alcohol consumption is a known risk factor for various types of cancer, including cancers of the mouth, throat, esophagus, liver, breast, and colorectal region. The ethanol in alcoholic beverages converts into acetaldehyde, a toxic compound that can damage DNA and proteins, leading to formation of cancer cells. Consider exploring the world of mocktails, which are non-alcoholic cocktails made with a variety of juices, sodas, and garnishes. Many restaurants and bars offer an array of mocktail options that can be just as enjoyable as alcoholic beverages.

✓ **Maintain a healthy weight through use of nutrition testing, fitness coaching or a daily brisk walk**

Excess body fat contributes to chronic low-grade inflammation in the body, which can negatively impact the immune system. A weakened immune system is less effective at recognizing and eliminating cancer cells. By maintaining a healthy weight, you support optimal immune function and improve your body's ability to defend against cancer.

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✓ **Make food your medicine, and think strategically about what's on your plate**

Eating a healthy diet with a variety of fruits and vegetables is crucial for cancer prevention. Nutrient dense foods provide a wide range of vitamins, minerals, antioxidants, and phytochemicals that support a healthy immune system and help protect cells from damage. Fruits and vegetables are generally low in calories and high in fiber, which can help maintain a healthy weight and reduce the risk of obesity-related to cancers. Additionally, certain fruits and vegetables contain compounds that have been linked to cancer prevention, such as cruciferous vegetables (broccoli, cabbage) and berries. By incorporating a colorful array of fruits and vegetables into your diet, you provide your body with powerful nutrients that promote overall health and reduce the risk of developing various types of cancer.

✓ **Don't worry be happy, mind your stress**

While stress has varied negative effects on overall health and well-being, there's no direct evidence substantiating that stress directly causes cancer. Cancer is a complex disease that typically develops due to a combination of genetic factors, environmental exposures and lifestyle choices. However, chronic stress indirectly affects our health by contributing to unhealthy behaviors such as smoking, poor diet, lack of exercise and inadequate sleep, which may increase the risk of developing cancers. Additionally, stress can impact the immune system, making it less effective in combating cancer cells. It's important to manage stress and adopt healthy coping strategies to maintain overall well-being.

✓ **Seek out free health screenings at health fairs, clinics or through your healthcare benefits plan**

Regular health screenings can detect cancer or pre-cancerous conditions at an early stage when treatment is often more effective. Screenings can identify abnormalities or signs of cancer before symptoms become apparent, enabling timely intervention and improving treatment outcomes.

Every journey begins with one step so be sure to make them count. You got this!

Our Communities Count in Cancer Prevention Too

Where we live, learn, work and play can affect whether we experience a cancer diagnosis. These conditions are called **social determinants of health**. The social determinants of health encompass the physical, mental, emotional and social aspects of well-being, providing real-life scenarios for neighborhoods, communities and public health officials to identify and address health disparities. According to the CDC, research shows a direct correlation in the number of diagnoses of cancer with people who reside (past or present) in neighborhoods and communities where health disparities exist. It is unrealistic to remove people from every area where disparities exist so, we must instead examine how we can shape our communities to align with a healthy lifestyle and more equitable environments. In the case of cancer prevention, check for these six Social Determinants of Health, which are critical to your physical, mental, emotional and social well-being:

- A good education – does your local library offer access to information and resources on cancer?
- Healthy food – do you have close access to a grocery store or a farmer's market in your area?
- A safe home to live in – is your home free of biohazards products, i.e., certain cleaning products?
- Reliable transportation – how far are you from the local bus route if you needed it?
- Health care – how far are you from your local pharmacy and how much is your medication?
- Clean water and air – is the air and water free of smoke, fog or contamination by industrial plants?

What can I do about these things? Make it your homework to scan your neighborhood for these Social Determinants of Health and share your findings with others who can design improvements. This list of "others" might include your neighbors or block club members, alderman and other local officials, such as county commissioners or the mayor's office. You can also seek out community organizations that sponsor initiatives to improve health outcomes, like community gardens, exercise programs and community meetings.

Small steps have impact, let's move!

Have questions about cancer? The National Cancer Institute (NCI) provides clear, accurate answers about cancer in English and Spanish. Reach the NCI Cancer Information Service at **1-800-4-CANCER (422-6237)**.

