

6 Ways Women Can Lower Their Risk of Cancer

Statistics say that about one in three of us will develop cancer during our lifetime, and about one in five of us will die from the disease.

Simply ignoring the possibility is not smart, especially when the choices you make today can greatly impact which side of those statistics you end up on in the future. Much better than finding the appropriate treatment is taking steps to **prevent cancer** before it gets started.

The DNA in each of your body's cells gets hit by a variety of insults every day. The damage that DNA receives is usually quickly repaired. But if that damage is prolonged, or the repair mechanisms are overworked or faulty, cancer is one possible result.

Knowing that helps you know many of the likely causes of cancer, and many of the ways you can prevent it as well. Whatever damages your body's cells has the potential lead to cancer, and whatever is good for your body's cells and their DNA will lessen your risk of cancer.

Here are six things you can do to help your body keep every cell's DNA in good working order and limit cancer-causing damage:

- 1. Don't smoke.** And stay away from second-hand smoke as well. You know this; you've heard it for years. But now you understand more about why 30 percent of all cancer deaths are caused by tobacco. There are dozens of cancer-causing chemicals in tobacco and tobacco smoke that damage the DNA in the cells not only of your lungs but also many other organs. Tobacco use leads to a significantly increased risk of cancer in all areas of the respiratory tract (mouth, nose, lips,

throat, sinuses), and also the esophagus, stomach, pancreas, kidney, bladder, uterus, cervix, colon, ovary, and one form of leukemia.

Wow! And you thought tobacco only damaged your lungs. Remember, the chemicals in tobacco are also absorbed into your bloodstream and can damage the DNA in cells you never thought could be affected.

This isn't a criticism of you if you use tobacco. It's addictive, and it can be very tough to quit. If you need help to stop using tobacco, get some help. Your risk of cancer begins to decrease as soon as you quit.

2. Stay active, manage your weight. You know exercise and body weight affect a person's risk of heart disease, but you may not realize how much they impact your risk of cancer as well. The American Cancer Society reports that one third of all cancer deaths are due to the combination of poor nutrition, lack of exercise, and excess weight. One in three! Being sedentary and being overweight both increase your risk of postmenopausal breast cancer, and cancer of the colon, uterus, pancreas, liver, kidney and others.

Research doesn't give a simple answer as to why weight and exercise would affect cancer risk so strongly. We do know that obesity changes your metabolism in many ways including increasing insulin resistance and increasing estrogen levels. These factors, and perhaps others, may damage a cell's DNA increasing the risk of cancer-causing damage.

Physical exercise not only helps to control your weight, but it increases oxygen delivery and blood flow throughout your body, helping your cells be more efficient at detecting and repairing any DNA damage and eliminating any toxins in your bloodstream. Exercise decreases blood levels of insulin and related proteins, and that decreases stress-induced damage to your cell's DNA.

3. Eat healthy. This is the third part of that triple-whammy of poor nutrition, lack of exercise and obesity causing one third of all cancer deaths. The wrong kinds of food dump stress-producing chemicals on your body's cells, increase insulin levels, and add to your waistline—all bad for your cell's DNA. The “bad stuff” includes processed and red meat, refined grain products, and sweetened beverages.

Eating healthy provides your body's cells with the ideal mechanisms to protect and repair DNA. Research repeatedly documents the cancer-preventing value of a diet rich in fruits and vegetables, whole grains, and fish or poultry, while limiting processed foods and red meat. Cruciferous vegetables such as broccoli, Brussels sprouts, kale, and cauliflower are particularly strong at preventing cancer.

Many individual phytonutrients found in fruits and vegetables have been studied for their cancer-fighting properties. No single antioxidant, when used alone, has been consistently proven to prevent cancer, perhaps because the phytonutrients in fruits and veggies work best when they're together in the combinations God built into our food plants. This is another reason why I recommend JuicePlus®—“fruits and vegetables in a capsule.”

4. Limit environmental exposures. This one gets most of the press coverage, but all these exposures together (occupational exposure and environmental pollutants both natural and man-made) account for only about six percent of all cancer deaths. That doesn't mean we should be complacent. Asbestos, hydrocarbons, various solvents and dyes, and chemicals used by leather-workers are some of the best established cancer-causing chemicals. Smog, cell phones, pesticides, formaldehyde in building materials – the best research indicates all these have at best a minimal effect on your risk of cancer.

We know too much radiation causes cancer; that's why you wear a lead apron while getting dental X-rays. Naturally occurring

radiation in the form of radon is more common than many people realize. It's a good idea to test the radon level in your home; inexpensive kits are available at many hardware stores. If the level is over 4 picocuries per liter (pCu/L), take steps to fix the problem.

5. Don't worship the sun. Tanning beds, sunbathing, or normal summer activities outdoors will increase your risk for skin cancers including the deadly melanoma. Ultraviolet rays damage your skin cell's DNA, and the healing after a sunburn may damage it even more. Your risk is higher if, like me, you have fair skin. Sunscreen can decrease your risk, but that brings up the question of more chemicals. A hat and light loose-fitting clothing covering your body are at least as effective. If you're going to be outside, do something to protect yourself. If you've ever known someone with melanoma you'd worry much less about the relatively very small risk of sunscreen.

6. Beware of viruses. Most viruses don't cause cancer, but a few can induce infected cells to become malignant by altering their DNA. HPV (human papilloma virus) is spread by touch. While most varieties of HPV are harmless, at least a dozen strains can cause cancer, and are often spread by close contact during either genital or oral sex. Cervical cancer is a sexually transmitted disease.

Almost all cases of cervical cancer are directly caused by HPV, as are many cancers of the anus, vagina, mouth and throat. HPV exposure and smoking together is especially damaging, since each insult adds to the damage to the cell's DNA.

Vaccines including Gardasil® and Cervarix® offer good though not perfect protection. The best prevention is a mutually monogamous life-long relationship with one husband; then your risk is zero.

Hepatitis B and C and the HIV virus are also associated with certain types of cancer. These viruses are spread through body fluids. Modern testing of the blood supply makes acquiring one of these viruses from a blood transfusion quite rare.

The Bottom Line

If you don't smoke, exercise regularly, eat a healthy diet, and are not overweight you've just eliminated the causes of nearly two-thirds of all cancers. And if you protect your skin from the sun and remain in a life-long mutually monogamous relationship you've eliminated another significant portion of your cancer risk.

Living a perfectly healthy lifestyle doesn't guarantee you won't get cancer, but it gives your body a much better chance of keeping your body's cells' DNA in good working order. Cancer will be much less likely, and you'll be in a much stronger position to fight it if it does happen to you.

How many of these six cancer prevention lifestyle habits are you practicing? Please leave a comment below. {eo}

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