



TO YOUR HEALTH

WELCOA'S ONLINE GENERAL WELLNESS BULLETIN

CUTTING YOUR CANCER RISK

Cancer is the name given to a collection of related diseases. In all types of cancer, some of the body's cells begin to divide without stopping and spread into surrounding tissues. Cancer can start almost anywhere in the human body, which is made up of trillions of cells.

Cancer starts with damage to the genes that control the way cells function. Many things you're exposed to over your lifetime can damage genes. These include but are not limited to chemicals, radiation, tobacco, and alcohol. Your body has ways to repair the damage, but they don't always work perfectly.

Moreover, as you age, your body has had more time to build up damage. And the normal aging process causes other changes in cells that help cancer develop. These factors make cancer more likely to appear as you age. However, because damage to your genes builds up slowly over time, there are many opportunities for prevention, and there are many things you can do to reduce your risk.

PREVENTION MEASURES

According to health experts there are several key things you can do to help prevent all kinds of cancer:

Don't smoke or quit if you do. Tobacco use is the leading cause of cancer in the U.S. This includes smoking and use of other tobacco products, like chewing tobacco. Many chemicals in tobacco products can damage your genes. Using tobacco also increases your risk of heart attack, stroke, lung disease, and many other conditions. But it can be very hard to stop—even if you know the risks.



Tobacco products contain an addictive substance called nicotine. There are medications that can help you quit. They can reduce nicotine withdrawal and cravings. Some are available by prescription. Others can be found over-the-counter, like nicotine replacement gums or patches. Using medications with counseling can be even more effective. Remember, no matter how long you've used tobacco or how old you are, quitting tobacco use will always benefit your health.

Focus on good nutrition and physical activity.

When it comes to cancer prevention, your overall lifestyle, including weight and physical activity, matters. There's a lot of evidence that maintaining a healthy lifestyle which includes proper nutrition and regular physical activity has the potential to reduce cancer risk.

How diet itself affects cancer risk is complicated. What we eat gets broken down and used by our cells to keep the body running. Chemicals in some foods—like highly

processed meats—may raise the risk of cancer. But overall, there aren't many single foods to avoid.

Other chemicals in food may lower your risk. But no single food, nutrient, or vitamin alone can protect you from cancer. It's really about the overall quality of your diet. Choose fruits and vegetables, whole grains, lean proteins, and healthy oils. Limit alcohol, added sugars, saturated fats, and sodium.

Additionally, healthy eating appears to reduce cancer risk even if you have trouble losing weight. And the same seems to be true for physical activity. Experts point out that physical activity lowers the risk of some types of cancers, independent of its effects on weight. This may be because exercise can reduce inflammation, stress, and other things that can harm your cells.

Make smart lifestyle choices. There are other simple actions you can take to reduce your risk of specific cancers. For example, to lower your chances of skin cancer, wear sunscreen and sun protective clothing, limit your time in the sun, and avoid tanning beds.

Certain vaccines can reduce your risk of cervical, liver, and other cancers. This is because some viruses, like human papillomavirus (HPV), can damage your genes in ways that lead to cancer. Getting vaccinated against HPV and other cancer-related viruses is a very practical way to modify your cancer risk.

Common screening tests can also reduce your risk. These let doctors find and remove small growths that may turn into cancer. A colonoscopy, which looks for growths in the colon and rectum, is one example. Cervical cancer screening is another.

TALK WITH YOUR DOC

Here are some simple questions you can ask your doctor about reducing your cancer risk:

- » What can you recommend to help me quit smoking? (if you smoke)
- » Have I had all the recommended vaccinations to prevent cancer?



- » What cancer screening tests should I have at my age?
- » What dietary changes can I make to help reduce my risk of cancer?
- » How can I safely exercise to improve my health?
- » Does my family medical history put me at higher risk for cancer?
- » Is there anything else I should know about my cancer risk?