Applying evidence to our daily lives
There is no ‘food prescription’ for exactly what you should eat, or how much of it, if you want to reduce the risk of cancer. But as the evidence grows, we can make recommendations about the balance of foods to aim for.

Aim for a healthy balanced diet that is:
• high in fibre, fruit and vegetables
• low in red and processed meat, saturated fat and salt.

Eat plenty of fibre
• Boost your fibre intake by eating lots of fruit and vegetables, including pulses.
• Try eating wholegrain starchy foods such as wholemeal bread and pasta, wholegrain cereals and brown rice.

Cut down on red and processed meat and saturated fat
• Choosing fish rather than red meat will help you cut down on saturated fat.
• Choose low-fat options and limit the oil or butter you add during cooking.

Cut down on salt
• Try to use less salt when cooking. And taste your food at the table before adding salt.
• Remember that ready-prepared meals are often high in salt, so check the labels before buying.

Get your five-a-day
• Try to eat at least five portions of fruit and vegetables each day.
• Choose a balance of different-coloured vegetables and fruit as these are likely to contain a variety of nutrients.
• It does not matter if they are tinned, dried or fresh, they still count towards your daily portions.

What counts as a portion?
A portion of fruit or vegetables is an 80g serving, for example:
• a medium-sized apple or other similar sized fruit
• a banana
• two satsumas or other similar sized fruit
• three heaped tablespoons of cooked vegetables such as carrots, peas or broccoli
• a cereal bowl’s worth of salad.

Lentils, beans and other pulses only count towards one of your daily portions as they do not contain as many nutrients as other fruits and vegetables. Similarly a 150ml glass of fruit juice or smoothie can only be counted as one portion each day, as they are high in sugar and low in fibre.

Further information
About food and cancer
For more about healthy eating and the science behind our messages visit cruik.org/health

About cancer
For more about cancer visit our patient information website cruik.org/cancer-help

If you want to talk in confidence about cancer, call our information nurses on freephone 0808 800 4040.

Order our full range of leaflets free online at cruik.org/leaflets

About Cancer Research UK
CRUK pioneers life-saving research to bring forward the day when all cancers are cured. From our volunteers and supporters to our scientists, doctors and nurses, we’re all here to save more lives and prevent, control and cure all cancers. If you would like to support our work, please call 0300 123 1861 or visit our website cruik.org
Which types of food affect the risk of cancer?
There are more than 200 types of cancer. Unravelling the effects of different foods and nutrients on cancer risk is very complicated. It is difficult to pinpoint which specific nutrients have an impact. For now, research is helping to give us more clues about what general types of food affect the risk of cancer.

Fruit and vegetables could protect against cancer
Research has shown that eating plenty of fruit and vegetables could protect against some cancers. These include cancers of the mouth, throat, oesophagus (food pipe), stomach and lung.

Fruit and vegetables contain a wide variety of nutrients and are high in fibre. Scientists are working to find out which of these nutrients protect against cancer.

It’s best to eat lots of different types of fruit and vegetables to get a good balance of vitamins and minerals. If you eat a healthy, balanced diet with plenty of fruit and vegetables, there’s no need to rely on supplements, unless advised by your doctor.

Too much red and processed meat can increase cancer risk
Bowel cancer is more common in people who eat lots of red and processed meat. Red meat includes all fresh, minced and frozen beef, pork, lamb or veal. Processed meats include bacon, ham, salami, sausages, spam, corned beef, black pudding, pâté and tinned or canned meat.

Scientists think chemicals in red and processed meat are involved in increasing cancer risk. Some chemicals are a natural part of the meat, and others are made when the meat is preserved, or cooked at high temperatures, such as grilling.

Fibre reduces bowel cancer risk
Much research has shown that bowel cancer is less common in people who eat lots of fibre.

Scientists think fibre could protect against bowel cancer by increasing the size of stools, reducing the time they spend in the bowel and diluting their contents. All of these things make it harder for cancer to develop.

Too much salt raises stomach cancer risk
Eating too much salt and foods high in salt increases the risk of stomach cancer. One way salt could increase cancer risk is by making the stomach lining more sensitive to cancer-causing chemicals.

Food and cancer in the headlines
Many stories about food and cancer make the headlines. But often the evidence in these areas is still unfolding.

You might have seen anything from broccoli to pomegranates named as the latest ‘superfood’, while additives and sweeteners have both been billed as causes of cancer.

These stories are sometimes based on a single study which disagrees with the weight of evidence. Overall, scientists do not think that either broccoli or pomegranates alone will prevent cancer. And the weight of evidence does not show that additives or sweeteners cause cancer. Even if one study finds a link, many others haven’t.

There have been stories about so-called health benefits of supplements. Research has shown that vitamin and mineral supplements do not have the same health benefits as vitamins and minerals in fruit and vegetables. And in some cases they may even increase the risk of cancer.

To get a balanced view on cancer stories in the news check out our blog cruk.org/blog