The Healthy Woman Guide

Essential advice for cancer prevention

World Cancer Research Fund
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Many of us worry about cancer. It is only natural given that most of us know of someone who has been touched by this disease at some time in their life.

If we told you that there are simple, everyday steps you can take to reduce your risk of this disease you might be surprised.

But it is possible – and very easy – to build effective cancer prevention steps into our daily routines. This leaflet is designed to show you how.

For instance, did you know that around 30-40 per cent of cancers could be prevented if we ate a better diet, packed with vegetables and fruits, undertook regular physical activity and maintained a healthy weight?

Learning to protect ourselves from cancer needn’t be hard work. The WCRF UK diet and lifestyle recommendations outlined here will also help reduce your risk of heart disease and diabetes, as well as promoting a healthy weight.

So what are you waiting for? Read on for simple steps that will make all the difference...
It's time for you!

Women are renowned for placing the needs of their family above their own. This is particularly true when it comes down to their health. But it is crucial that we begin to look after ourselves too.

UK statistics show that we're not looking after ourselves as well as we could. We are smoking and drinking much more than our mothers and grandmothers ever did, and our physical activity levels have dropped significantly. With the pace of modern life as it is today, many of us feel we lack the time, energy or motivation to eat healthily and exercise regularly.

Unfortunately though, as the pressures mount, we often do the opposite of what we should. We tend to fall back on things like strong coffee, junk food, cigarettes or maybe a few too many glasses of wine. Sadly, it is often these things that cause us to feel more tired and less able to cope in the short term. And over time, they may also increase our risk of life-threatening illness.

Prioritising our own health could also benefit the health of loved ones. Children learn by example – so by taking regular exercise and not smoking we provide the right environment for our children and other members of the family to thrive.

Cancer prevention guide for women

1. Clean up your diet

According to experts from the WCRF global network and World Health Organisation (WHO) around 30 per cent of cancers are thought to be related to diet and nutrition, making diet the second most important lifestyle change, after not smoking.

Eating healthily doesn’t have to be complicated or expensive. There are just a few simple rules to stick by:

i) Stock the fridge and cupboards with lots of plant-based foods such as vegetables, fruits, wholegrains and beans. We should try to fill most of our plate with these, leaving just a quarter or less for other foods. Plant foods are loaded with the goodness our body needs to stay healthy and to help prevent cancer. There's no need to be a vegetarian – we can still enjoy meat (lean meat is best). Or why not replace meat with poultry or fish, which will help reduce the saturated fat in our diet.
Eating healthily doesn’t have to be complicated or expensive
It's easy to create a more healthy diet. Try starting the day with a glass of orange juice and sliced fruit on wholegrain cereal. If having toast choose wholemeal bread. At lunch, have a big, colourful salad or simply add some extra tomato and lettuce to your chicken or tuna sandwich. Snack on some vegetables or fruit if you get hungry. And, for the evening meal, try a vegetable and prawn stir-fry with noodles or a dish with wholemeal pasta or brown rice. Don't forget that frozen vegetables are as good as fresh and that potatoes, and washed fruits with their skins left on (when edible), and raw vegetables are all positive steps to a healthier lifestyle.

Improving our diet is such a worthwhile thing to do, though remember that reaching the optimum diet may take time. We don't have to become food faddists to make worthwhile enhancements to our health.

**TOP TIP**

*Always have more than one vegetable with your main meal. Studies show that we eat more vegetables when we serve different ones in the same meal.*

ii) Cut the fat and salt

**Starting from today, try cooking without adding extra salt or fat.** Both of these have been linked to an increased risk of some cancers, heart disease and stroke. Unfortunately, many of today's pre-packed meals are loaded with fat and salt. But there are many other ways to flavour foods – try herbs, spices, or low fat alternatives (such as reduced fat crème fraîche or low fat cheese).

We don’t have to spend hours in the kitchen to have a healthy diet. Some busy women find it useful to cook a large batch of a healthy dish at the weekend and to freeze individual servings for the week ahead.

There are plenty of low-fat, quick recipes available on the Internet or in bookstores. Visit our website: www.wcrf-uk.org for some great ideas or send off for our free cookbooks – Main meals, Light bites, Breakfast boosts or Quick fixes (see back page for contact details).

Watch out too for low-fat processed foods that are high in sugar. Sugar is not linked directly with cancer but it can make foods dense in calories and so is linked to obesity.
TOP TIP
To make a meal healthier in just a few minutes, use frozen vegetables, available in bite-sized pieces (saves chopping and washing). Another quick option is to add some fish (such as tinned tuna) or chicken to a pre-prepared salad. Or buy fresh, chopped vegetables to make a quick vegetarian stir-fry, or to keep in your fridge as a healthy snack.

TOP TIP
Read the labels on food packages. As a general rule 0.5g of sodium per 100g of food is considered to be a lot of sodium (salt); 0.1g sodium per 100g is considered to be a small amount. Meanwhile, watch out for food high in saturated fat, such as sausages, meat and meat pies, cakes and pastries. Cut down on trans fats too – found in food containing hydrogenated vegetable oil. Many manufacturers of margarines and spreads have now reduced trans fats in their products to extremely low levels. Choose foods rich in unsaturated fat such as oily fish, avocados and sunflower, rapeseed and olive oils.

(iii) Variety is best
To make sure we’re getting a range of all of the important nutrients needed for good health, it’s best to mix and match. There are also all sorts of grains available these days, such as couscous or bulgar wheat. Why not experiment with unusual leafy vegetables such as Chinese leaves, pak choi and curly kale?

TOP TIP
One of the best ways to ensure a healthy diet is to check your shopping trolley as you go along or make a list before you go out. Do you have a range of different coloured vegetables, fruits, grains and beans? Try to include red, orange, yellow, purple, green and brown coloured foods. If what’s in your trolley looks a bit like a rainbow, then you’re on the right track!