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**EXTENSION**

# Nutrition for Older Adults: Dietary and Health Guidelines To Lower The Risk Of Cancer

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## Cancer

Cancer is second leading cause of death in the United States. Many factors may have a role in cancer development.

## Genetic Factors

Some cancers may have an inherited genetic factor. Knowing your family history of cancer is important.

## Immune Factors

A healthy immune system destroys foreign cells. A weak immune system may not recognize cancer cells as foreign. This can allow uncontrolled cancer cell growth.

## Environmental Factors

Some environmental factors may increase the risk of certain types of cancer such as:

- Excess radiation and sunlight.
- Water and air pollution.

## Lifestyle Factors

Some lifestyle factors known to increase cancer risk include:

- Smoking.
- Physical inactivity.
  - Lack of physical activity may have a direct role in the development of certain types of cancer.

- Lack of physical activity may also increase the risk of obesity which is a risk factor for certain types of cancer.

## Dietary Factors

Some dietary factors may increase the risk of cancer. Other dietary factors may lower the risk of cancer.

Some dietary factors may increase risk by initiating cancer development:

- Very high levels of some pesticides.
  - Levels permitted on fruits and vegetables are safe.
  - Benefit of fruits and vegetables far exceed any potential risk.
- High alcohol intake.
  - High alcohol intake is linked to certain types of cancer.
- Certain meat preparation methods.
  - Frying
  - Broiling
  - Grilling
  - Smoking
  - Salt curing.
- Fruits and vegetables may protect against this risk.

Other dietary factors may increase risk by promoting cancer development once it has started:

- High fat intake.
  - High saturated fat intake may increase the risk of certain types of cancer.
  - High fat diets may also increase the risk of obesity which is a risk factor for certain types of cancer.
    - However, omega-3 fatty acids found in seafood may lower risk.
- Obesity.
  - Obesity is linked with increased risk of certain types of cancer. This may be related to high fat intake, high calorie intake or low physical activity.
- High muscle meat intake.
  - High muscle meat intake is linked to certain types of cancer. This may be related to:
    - Preparation method
    - Calories from fat
    - Type of fat intake
  - Diets high in muscle meat may also be low in fruits, vegetables which help lower cancer risk.

Still other dietary factors may lower cancer risk by protecting against cancer development:

- Fruits; vegetables; whole grains; and beans, peas and lentils. These foods

contain compounds that may help lower cancer risk:

- Dietary fiber.
- Antioxidants including vitamin C and vitamin E.
- Phytochemicals.
- Seafood provides omega 3 fatty acids and low-fat dairy foods provide calcium. These nutrients may also help lower risk of certain types of cancer.

## Advice to Lower Cancer Risk:

Some guidelines to help lower cancer risk are:

- Maintain a healthy weight.
- Be physically active each day.
- Consume ample fruits; vegetables; whole grains; beans, peas and lentils; seafood and low-fat dairy.
- Choose foods with less fat. When consuming fats choose polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats and oils over saturated and trans fats.
- Choose foods with less added salt and sodium.
- Use alcohol in moderation.
- Abstain from smoking.

## Sources

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