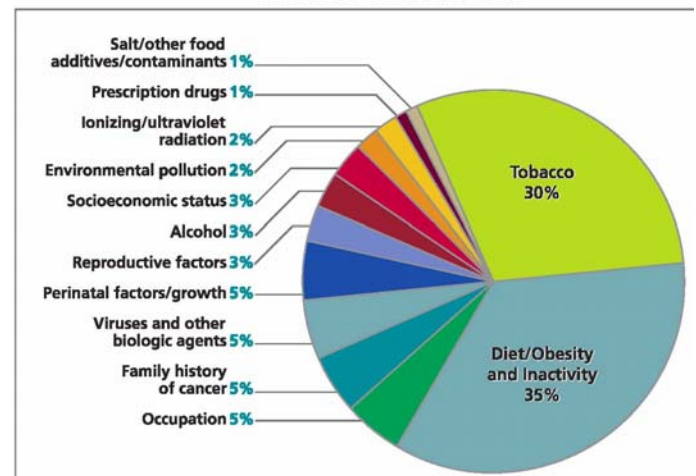


## Link Between Lifestyle and Cancer

By Dr. Tim Byers and Colleen Doyle, MS, RD

How much do your daily habits – like diet and exercise – affect your risk for cancer? These choices are among the most important factors in a person’s risk of cancer. Fortunately, they are within our own control. For the majority of Americans who do not smoke, eating a healthful diet and being physically active are the most important ways to reduce cancer risk. Evidence suggests that one third of the 550,000 cancer deaths that occur in the United States each year are due to unhealthy diet and insufficient physical activity.

Causes of Cancer



### Getting Moving

While it has long been an accepted fact that physical activity reduces one’s risk of heart disease, it’s still news that physical activity can also reduce the risk of cancer. Physical activity works in a variety of ways to reduce risk, including by helping control weight and by influencing hormones.

How much is enough? Adults should be moderately active for at least 30 minutes on five or more days per week. For reducing risk for breast cancer and colon cancer, even more exercise may be better. For children and teens, the recommendation is 60 minutes or more. However, the most important change in physical activity most of us can make is to move from being sedentary to incorporating even a moderate degree of activity into our daily routine.

### Controlling Weight

Maintaining a healthy weight is important to reduce the risk of cancer and other chronic diseases, such as heart disease and diabetes. Being overweight or obese increases the risk of several cancers, including cancers of the breast (among women over age 50), colon, endometrium, esophagus, and kidneys.

Being overweight works in a variety of ways to increase cancer risk. These include mechanical ways in which abdominal obesity leads to acid reflux into the esophagus, and hormonal ways, in which obesity increases circulating levels of hormones such as estrogen and insulin that can stimulate cancer growth. Achieving an ideal weight need not be the first goal though, as substantial benefits can come from first stopping weight gain, then beginning to achieve a modest amount of weight loss.

### Vegetables and Fruits

Greater consumption of vegetables and fruits has been shown to lower risk of several cancers, including cancers of the lung, mouth, esophagus, stomach, and colon. Vegetables and fruits are packed with vitamins, minerals, fiber, antioxidants, and many other substances, which together account for their beneficial effect.

Because it is not known which of these components is most protective, the best advice is to get healthy nutrition from whole foods rather than from nutritional supplements. Eat at least five servings of vegetables and fruits each day, especially those with the most color (a sign of high nutrient content).

### Fat

High fat diets have been associated with an increased risk of cancers of the colon and prostate, but there is little or no association between high fat diets and breast cancer risk. Current evidence suggests that it might be the *type* of fat in the diet, rather than the *total amount* of fat, that is most important to consider. Limiting saturated fat may be particularly important to reduce risk for both cancer and heart disease. Choose lean meats and low-fat dairy products, and substitute vegetables oils (like canola and olive) for butter or lard.

### Risk Reduction in Our Communities

Adopting a healthier lifestyle is easier for people who live, work, play, or go to school in an environment that supports healthy behaviors. Working together, communities can create the type of environment where *healthy* choices become *easy* choices. We all can contribute to those changes: Let’s ask for healthier food choices at our workplace and where our children go to school. Let’s support restaurants that serve healthy options. And let’s help make our communities safer and more appealing places to walk, bike, and be active.

## Fend Off Disease By Seeing Your Doctor Regularly

Many life-threatening diseases can be treated more effectively—or even prevented altogether. But you need a doctor's help. Be sure to ask about these screening tests recommended by the American Cancer Society, American Diabetes Association, and American Heart Association.



**Blood Pressure Check**—Check at each regular health care visit.

**Body Mass Index (BMI)**—Check at each regular health care visit.

**Clinical Breast Exam (CBE) & Mammography**—Get a CBE every three years until age 40, then yearly with your mammogram.

**Pap Test**—Get one every year from age 20 to 30; at age 30 and beyond, get screened every one to three years depending on the type of test and past results.

**Cholesterol Check**—Starting at age 20, get tested every five years.

**Colon Screening**—Starting at age 50, get screened every one to 10 years, depending on the type of test.

**Prostate Exam**—Starting at age 50, ask your doctor about the pros and cons of testing.

Depending on your family history and personal medical history, you may need some other tests too, or you may need to start screening at a younger age. Talk to your doctor today to find out which screening tests are right for you.



## Take This List of Questions to Your Next Doctor's Appointment

1. At my age, what screening tests should I have?
2. I have a family history of (cancer/diabetes/heart disease/stroke). Is there a different schedule of screening tests I should follow?
3. With my family history, do I need to be more concerned about my diet? My weight? My physical activity level?
4. Am I at a healthy weight? What should I do to lose weight?
5. How much physical activity should I get? How can I get started?
6. What's the best way for me to stop smoking?

### Did you know?

Tobacco kills more than half of its users. Don't be one of its victims.

- If you don't smoke, don't start.
- If you do smoke, quit. It won't be easy, but the right resources can help double your chances of success. Talk to your doctor or contact your American Cancer Society.

## Looking to Lose Weight?

- To take off one pound per week, you'll need to reduce calories by 500 per day.
- One pound of body fat equals about 3,500 calories.
- Try eating 250 calories less per day.
- Exercise enough to burn 250 calories.
- The easiest way to cut back on calories is to watch your portion sizes.

To learn more about how many calories you need to maintain your current weight, or how many calories are burned with different activities, visit our website at [www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org).



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