

Taking the right steps to prevent cancer

In 2009, President Barack Obama proclaimed April as National Cancer Control Month. At that time, he asked us to work together in support of the nation's goal to control, and ultimately defeat, this devastating disease.

Healthy lifestyle choices can help to prevent many types of cancer. The American Institute for Cancer Research has provided the following 10 recommendations for cancer prevention:

- 1. Maintain a healthy weight without being underweight.** Having excess fat around the waist is especially harmful. Abdominal fat has been linked to an increased risk for cancers of the colon, pancreas, uterus and breast.
- 2. Be physically active at least 30 minutes every day.** Regular exercise has been shown to keep hormone levels healthy. High levels of some hormones can increase cancer risk. Exercise also strengthens your immune system.
- 3. Avoid sugary drinks and too many calorie-dense foods.** Sugar-containing beverages and high-calorie processed foods with extra sugar and fat contribute to weight gain. Choose water as your beverage more often.
- 4. Eat more fruit, vegetables, whole grains and legumes (beans).** Aim for at least two-thirds of your plate filled with these foods. They contain fiber and other nutrients which can lower your risk for cancer.
- 5. Limit your consumption of red meat, and avoid processed meats.** Eat no more than 18 ounces of beef, pork and lamb per week. Avoid all processed meats like ham, bacon, salami, sausages and hot dogs. They have been shown to increase the risk for colorectal cancer.
- 6. Limit alcoholic drinks to two a day for men, one for women.** There is evidence that more than this amount increases your risk for cancers of the mouth, pharynx, larynx, esophagus and breast, as well as for colorectal and liver cancer.
- 7. Limit salty foods and foods processed with salt.** Foods high in sodium include canned and frozen meals, chips, breads and cereals. Too much sodium increases the risk of stomach cancer. Check the sodium on the nutrition facts label and keep your intake less than 2,400 mg. a day.
- 8. Avoid taking supplements to prevent cancer.** There is strong evidence that taking high-doses of some nutrients increases the risk of cancer. It's better to eat lots of nutrient-rich whole foods that contain fiber, antioxidants, and phytochemicals—substances found in plant foods that have cancer-fighting properties.
- 9. Breastfeed your baby exclusively for up to six months.** Evidence shows that breastfeeding protects mothers from breast cancer. Breastfed babies tend to avoid the excess weight gain that leads to being an overweight adult. Overweight adults have a higher risk for cancer.
- 10. After treatment, cancer survivors should follow the recommendations for cancer prevention.** Unless otherwise advised, aim to follow the recommendations for diet, physical activity and weight maintenance.

And remember, don't smoke or chew tobacco. If you do, quit now!