



# Healthy eating and reducing your cancer risk



By 2025 it is estimated that approximately 25% of cancers diagnosed in Australia will be due to a combination of being overweight or obese, physical inactivity and poor nutrition. The good news is that if you make changes to your diet and maintain a healthy weight you can help reduce your risk of some cancers. In contrast, an unhealthy diet can increase your risk of some cancers.

Adopting a healthy lifestyle is also important for those who have been diagnosed with cancer.

Healthy eating can help reduce your cancer risk and provides many health benefits such as:

- Helping you reach and maintain a healthy weight
- Boosts your immune system
- Improves your concentration levels and mental health
- Increased energy levels
- Helps your body grow and repair
- Reduces your risk of other diseases.

## Five ways your diet can help reduce your cancer risk:

- 1** Eat two serves of fruit and five serves of vegetables every day
- 2** Choose wholegrain, wholemeal or high fibre bread, cereal, grains, rice and pasta
- 3** Limit red meat and avoid processed meats
- 4** Choose foods low in sugar and saturated fat
- 5** Make sure you have enough dietary fibre in your diet every day.

## Fruit and Vegetables

Fruit and vegetables are low in fat and kilojoules. They are also high in fibre and contain important vitamins, minerals and antioxidants. Eating plenty of fruits and vegetables may help reduce the risk of developing some cancers, such as cancer of the mouth, pharynx, larynx, stomach and bowel.

## Wholegrain bread, cereal and grains

Wholegrains contain fibre, starch, vitamins, minerals, antioxidants and protein. Wholegrain breads, cereals and grains help your digestion and can help lower your risk of bowel cancer.

## Red meat and processed meat

Red meat is an important source of iron and protein, but you should limit how much you eat to no more than 455g per week.

Regularly eating processed meat, such as bacon, salami and ham can increase the risk of bowel cancer.



## Salt, sugar and fat

Diets high in salt have been linked to an increased risk of stomach cancer.

Eating too much sugar and fat can lead to weight gain. Being overweight or obese is linked to several cancers. These include bowel, postmenopausal breast, kidney, pancreatic, endometrial and oesophageal cancer.

## Dietary fibre

Dietary fibre is great for our digestive health, but it also assists in reducing the risk of bowel cancer. Dietary fibre is the part of vegetables, fruits, wholegrains, legumes, nuts and seeds, that cannot be digested in the stomach or small intestine. Instead, it passes relatively unchanged into the large intestine where it is fermented by friendly bacteria.

### Fibre helps to reduce cancer risk in four ways:

- 1** Binds carcinogens to the stool and expels them from the body.
- 2** Good bacteria in the colon converts fibre into short-chain fatty acids. Short-chain fatty acids reduce the ability of cells in the intestine to become cancerous.
- 3** By helping us to feel fuller for longer, fibre plays a key role in maintaining a healthy weight.
- 4** Reducing absorption of carbohydrates into the blood reduces insulin resistance, reducing the risk of some cancers.

### Recommended amount of fibre to have each day

Recommended Daily Fibre Intakes for Adults is 30g for men and 25g for women every day.



## TIPS AND HINTS

- > **Eat the skin on your fruits and vegetables** to get the most fibre out of your food.
- > **Eating whole fruits and vegetables is better for your gut than drinking the juice.** If choosing juice, be sure to stir in the pulp or blend in whole fruits and vegetables.
- > **Increase fruit and vegetables.** Add fresh, frozen or tinned fruit as a topping on breakfast cereal or yoghurt. Add vegetables to dishes such as stir-fry, curry, bolognese and casseroles.
- > **Halve the amount of meat in recipes and use vegetables instead.** Substitute chicken, fish, seafood, tofu or eggs for red meat in some meals. Cook a roast on the weekend and use leftover meat for sandwiches instead of processed meats.
- > **Choose wholegrain, wholemeal or high fibre options.** Add legumes or lentils to meals such as bolognese, casseroles, curries and stews. Add grains or legumes to a salad – try chickpeas, quinoa, buckwheat or brown rice.
- > **Choose foods low in salt, sugar and fat.** Use hummus, avocado, pesto or low-fat cream cheese on your sandwiches instead of butter. Use herbs and spices to flavour meals instead of salt.

### References

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