

Preventing Cancer

Research studies have shown that some types of cancer are linked to an individual's **genetics** (traits inherited from biological parents), lifestyle, and environmental exposures, although causes for a large proportion of cancers remain unknown. Some risk factors for cancer can be modified (see below). Other factors, such as family history, cannot be altered. However, finding out about family history and genetic risks for cancer can help with early detection and better treatment. The May 26, 2004, issue of *JAMA* includes several articles about cancer.

WAYS TO PREVENT CANCER

Stop Smoking

Cigarette smoking is the number one preventable cause of cancer. Cigarette smoking is linked to many different kinds of cancer and at least one third of all cancer deaths. More than 40 compounds in cigarette smoke have been identified as **carcinogenic** (cancer-causing).

Eat a Healthful Diet

Obesity and overweight have been linked to development of several cancers, including breast, colon, and uterine. Eating healthful foods in smaller portions can help to reduce or maintain weight in a healthful range.

- Eat at least 5 servings of fruit and vegetables every day.
- Limit your intake of saturated fats from meats, full-fat dairy products, and processed foods.
- Include high-fiber choices (whole-grain breads and cereals, raw fruits and vegetables).
- Avoid foods that have been charred or blackened because they may have higher levels of carcinogens.

Use Alcohol Only in Moderation

Excessive alcohol use has been shown to cause esophageal cancer and oral cancers and has been linked to development of other types of cancers as well.

Avoid Exposure to Ultraviolet Rays

Exposure to sun and tanning beds is a risk factor for skin cancer.

- Stay out of the sun during high-exposure times (10 AM-4 PM).
- Use sunscreen with **SPF** (sun protection factor) of at least 15.
- Wear protective clothing, including sunglasses.
- Avoid tanning in either natural or artificial sunlight.

Exercise Every Day

Physical inactivity has been linked to development of several cancers, including colon and breast cancer. Regular exercise reduces these risks and brings many health benefits.

Some type of regular exercise should be done most days of the week for at least 30 minutes. Even small efforts to increase your daily physical activity can be helpful (taking the stairs instead of the elevator, parking farther away and walking, taking walks with friends or a dog).

Recognize Occupational and Environmental Hazards

Be aware of **radiation** (x-ray) and chemical hazards at your home or place of employment. Materials safety data sheets (MSDSs) contain information about carcinogens and should be available if you work with hazardous materials.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- American Cancer Society
800/227-2345
www.cancer.org
- National Cancer Institute
800/4-CANCER
www.cancer.gov or www.nci.nih.gov
- National Comprehensive Cancer Network
888/909-NCCN
www.nccn.org

INFORM YOURSELF

To find this and previous JAMA Patient Pages, go to the Patient Page link on *JAMA*'s Web site at www.jama.com. A Patient Page on stomach cancer was published in the January 14, 2004, issue; one on colon cancer screening was published in the March 12, 2003, issue; one on lung cancer was published in the January 15, 2003, issue; one on ovarian cancer was published in the July 17, 2002, issue; and one on cancer and children was published in the April 10, 2002, issue.

Sources: American Cancer Society, National Cancer Institute, National Comprehensive Cancer Network

Janet M. Torpy, MD, Writer

Cassio Lynn, MA, Illustrator

Richard M. Glass, MD, Editor

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