

You've probably heard conflicting reports in the news about what can or can't help you in terms of cancer prevention. The issue of cancer prevention gets confusing — sometimes what's recommended in one report is advised against in another. What you can be sure of when it comes to cancer prevention is that making small changes to your everyday life might help reduce your chances of getting cancer. Try these seven cancer prevention steps from Mercy Medical Center.

Cancer prevention step 1: Don't use tobacco

All types of tobacco put you on a collision course with cancer. Rejecting tobacco, or deciding to stop using it, is one of the most important health decisions you can make. It's also an important part of cancer prevention.

Smoking has been linked to several types of cancer, including:

- Bladder
- Cervix
- Esophagus
- Kidney
- Lip
- Lung
- Mouth
- Pancreas
- Throat
- Voice box (larynx)

Chewing tobacco has been linked to multiple types of cancer, including:

- Esophagus
- Mouth
- Pancreas
- Throat

Inhaled chewing tobacco (snuff) may increase the risk of cancers, including:

- Esophagus
- Mouth

Cancer prevention step 2: Eat a variety of healthy foods

Though making healthy selections at the grocery store and at mealtime can't guarantee you won't get cancer, it may help reduce your risk.

The American Cancer Society recommends that you:

- **Eat an abundance of foods from plant-based sources.** Eat five or more servings of fruits and vegetables each day. In addition, eat other foods from plant sources, such as whole grains and beans, several times a day. Replacing high-calorie foods in your diet with fruits and vegetables may help you lose weight or maintain your weight. A diet high in fruits and vegetables has been linked to a reduced risk of cancers of the colon, esophagus, lung and stomach.

- **Limit fat.** Eat lighter and leaner by choosing fewer high-fat foods, particularly those from animal sources. High-fat diets tend to be higher in calories and may increase the risk of overweight or obesity, which can, in turn, increase cancer risk.

- **Drink alcohol in moderation, if at all.** Your risk of cancers, including mouth, throat, esophagus, kidney, liver and breast cancers, increases with the amount of alcohol you drink and the length of time you've been drinking regularly. Even a moderate amount of drinking — two drinks a day if you're a man or one drink a day if you're a woman, and one drink a day regardless of your sex if you're over 65 — may increase your risk.

Cancer prevention step 3:

Stay active and maintain a healthy weight

Maintaining a healthy weight and exercising regularly also may play a role in cancer prevention. Being overweight or obese may increase your risk of cancers of the breast, colon, esophagus, kidney, stomach and uterus. Physical activity can help you avoid obesity by controlling your weight. Physical activity on its own may also lower your risk of cancers of the breast, colon, prostate and uterus.

Try to be physically active for 30 minutes or more on most days of the week. Once you achieve that goal, adding more exercise to your day may reduce your risk of certain cancers further.

Cancer prevention step 4: Protect yourself from the sun

Skin cancer is one of the most common kinds of cancer — and one of the most preventable. Although repeated exposure to X-rays or contact with certain chemicals can play a role, sun exposure is by far the most common cause of skin cancer.

Most skin cancer occurs on exposed parts of your body, including your face, hands, forearms and ears. Nearly all skin cancer is treatable if you detect it early, but it's better to prevent it in the first place. Try these tips:

Avoid peak radiation hours. The sun's ultraviolet (UV) radiation peaks between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. Minimize or avoid being outside during these hours.

- **Stay in the shade.** If you go outside, minimize your sun exposure by staying in the shade.
- **Cover exposed areas.** Wear light-colored, loosefitting clothing that protects you from the sun's rays. Use tightly woven fabrics that cover your arms and legs, and wear a broad-brimmed hat that covers your head and ears.
- **Don't skimp on sunscreen.** Use a broad-spectrum sunscreen that has a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 15.
- **Don't use indoor tanning beds or sunlamps.** These also can damage your skin. There's no such thing as a healthy tan.

Cancer prevention step 5: Get immunized

Certain cancers are associated with viral infections that can be prevented with immunizations. Talk to your doctor about immunization against:

- **Hepatitis B.** Hepatitis B can increase your risk of developing liver cancer. Vaccination is recommended for all babies in the United States. Certain high-risk adults also may need to be vaccinated.
- **Human papillomavirus (HPV).** HPV is a sexually transmitted virus that can lead to cervical cancer. The vaccine that protects against two cancer-causing types of HPV is recommended for girls ages 11 to 12. In addition, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends that the HPV vaccine be given to girls and women ages 13 to 26 who haven't completed the full vaccine series.
- Talk to your doctor about whether you would benefit from immunizations to reduce your risk of cancer.

Cancer prevention step 6: Avoid risky behaviors

Reduce your risk of certain cancers by avoiding risky behaviors that can lead to infections that may increase your risk of cancer. Viruses transmitted sexually or by sharing contaminated needles include:

- **HPV**. HPV is most often associated with cervical cancer. But HPV may also increase the risk of cancers of the anus, penis, throat, vulva and vagina. The more sexual partners you have in your lifetime, the more likely you are to have HPV.

- **Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)**. People with HIV or AIDS have an increased risk of anal cancer, cervical cancer, liver cancer, lymphoma and Kaposi's sarcoma. People with multiple sexual partners and intravenous (IV) drug users who share needles have an increased risk of HIV.

- **Hepatitis B and C**. Chronic hepatitis B or hepatitis C infection can increase your risk of liver cancer. Both forms of hepatitis can be passed through sexual contact with an infected person or sharing needles with an infected drug user.

- Reduce your risk of these cancers by avoiding risky behaviors. Abstain from sex or use condoms and limit the number of sexual partners you have. Never share needles. Seek help for your addiction if you use drugs.

Cancer prevention step 7: Get screened

Regular screening and self-examination for certain cancers may not prevent cancer, but it can increase your chances of discovering cancer early — when treatment is more likely to be successful. Screening should include your skin, mouth, colon and rectum. If you're a man, it should also include your prostate and testes. If you're a woman, include cervix and breast cancer screening on your list. Be aware of changes in your body — this may help you detect cancer early, increasing your chances of successful treatment. If you notice any changes, see your doctor.

For more information about cancer prevention, diagnosis and treatment, visit Mercy's Web site at MercySiouxCity.com. By visiting our Health Library on the site, you can even take a Cancer Risk Assessment to determine just how much you're at risk of developing certain types of cancer.