



World  
Cancer  
Research  
Fund

# 10 WAYS TO PROTECT YOURSELF AGAINST CANCER

Dear supporter,

Thank you for choosing World Cancer Research Fund's guide, 10 Ways to Protect Yourself Against Cancer.

If we all lived healthy lifestyles, which includes eating a healthy diet, being physically active and maintaining a healthy weight, around four in ten – or 40 per cent – of cancer cases could be prevented. By following our Cancer Prevention Recommendations, you can reduce your risk of cancer in later life. Our Recommendations will also help reduce your risk of other diseases, such as heart disease and type 2 diabetes.

In this guide, you will find out more about each of our Cancer Prevention Recommendations, with practical ways of including them into your daily life. We'll give you tips and advice to help you make simple changes to your diet and lifestyle to reduce your risk of cancer.

Our Cancer Prevention Recommendations are based on the latest research on cancer prevention and survival, related to diet, weight and physical activity. They provide the most reliable guidance currently available on reducing your risk of cancer.

This guide has been created by health information specialists who have expertise in nutrition, physical activity and behaviour change. We hope you find it interesting and informative.

Please help us spread our important cancer prevention messages by sharing it with your family and friends.

Yours faithfully,

*Kate Allen*

**Dr Kate Allen**

Executive Director, Science & Public Affairs



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# Cancer Prevention Recommendations



## **Be a healthy weight**

Keep your weight within the healthy range and avoid weight gain in adult life



## **Be physically active**

Be physically active as part of everyday life – walk more and sit less



## **Eat a diet rich in wholegrains, vegetables, fruit and beans**

Make wholegrains, vegetables, fruit, and pulses (legumes) such as beans and lentils a major part of your usual daily diet



## **Limit consumption of 'fast foods' and other processed foods high in fat, starches or sugars**

Limiting these foods helps control calorie intake and maintain a healthy weight



## **Limit consumption of red and processed meat**

Eat no more than moderate amounts of red meat, such as beef, pork and lamb. Eat little, if any, processed meat



## **Limit consumption of sugar-sweetened drinks**

Drink mostly water and unsweetened drinks



## **Limit alcohol consumption**

For cancer prevention, it's best not to drink alcohol



## **Do not use supplements for cancer prevention**

Aim to meet nutritional needs through diet alone



## **For mothers: breastfeed your baby, if you can**

Breastfeeding is good for both mother and baby



## **After a cancer diagnosis: follow our Recommendations, if you can**

Check with your health professional what is right for you

**Not smoking and avoiding other exposure to tobacco and excess sun are also important in reducing cancer risk.**

**Following these Recommendations is likely to reduce intakes of salt, saturated and trans fats, which together will help prevent other non-communicable diseases.**

# What causes cancer?

Many people think cancer is caused only by inherited genes or bad luck. However, research shows that specific inherited genes only cause a small proportion of cancers, whereas diet and lifestyle play a much bigger part.

## Inherited genes

Scientists have identified genes that are linked to cancer, including breast and bowel cancers, but these are rare. People who inherit these genes have a higher risk of cancer, but it doesn't mean that they will definitely get cancer. In many cases, their risk can be reduced by following our Cancer Prevention Recommendations.

If you have a history of cancer in your family, or are concerned you may have inherited genes that increase your cancer risk, it is always best to speak to your doctor.



**About 5-10%  
of all cancers  
result from  
specific  
inherited genes**



# What can I do?

You may already know that smoking and too much sun can be causes of cancer, but did you know that you can reduce your risk of cancer by making other changes to your lifestyle too?

A growing number of independent studies show that the more you follow our Cancer Prevention Recommendations, the lower your risk of developing and dying from cancer. Our research shows that it's the overall pattern of eating, drinking and physical activity across a lifetime that also counts.

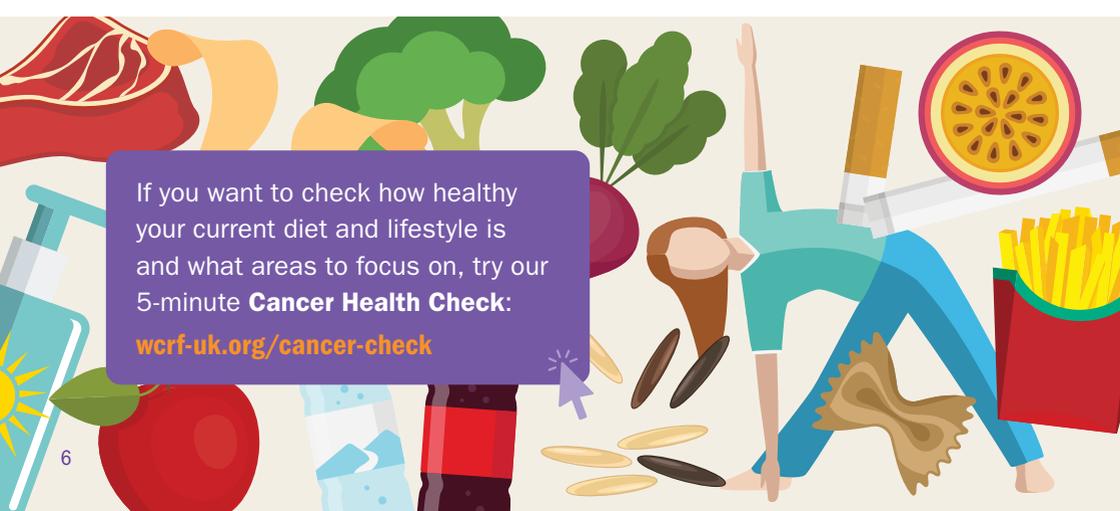
Despite what some may claim, there is no single food that can prevent cancer. It's our overall way of eating and how active we are that has the biggest impact on our risk.

## Taking small steps

You don't have to make extreme changes to your diet and lifestyle to help protect yourself against cancer. Your health could benefit by making a few small changes.

**Any changes you make towards adopting our Recommendations will help reduce your risk of cancer. You'll benefit most from following all of them.**

Don't worry about the occasional indulgence; the important thing is to **make healthy choices a normal part of your everyday life**. Keep reading to find out more about our Recommendations and what changes you can make to your diet and lifestyle to help improve your health and reduce your cancer risk.

An illustration at the bottom of the page shows a variety of food items including a piece of meat, a banana, broccoli, a beetroot, a carrot, a slice of orange, a bowl of pasta, a bag of french fries, a bottle of water, a bottle of soda, and a person lying on their back with one arm raised. A purple text box is overlaid on the illustration.

If you want to check how healthy your current diet and lifestyle is and what areas to focus on, try our 5-minute **Cancer Health Check**:

[wcrf-uk.org/cancer-check](http://wcrf-uk.org/cancer-check)

## Recommendation 1

# Be a healthy weight

Keep your weight within the healthy range and avoid weight gain in adult life.



We know that keeping the pounds from creeping on – never mind losing weight – can be hard, but trying to maintain a healthy weight is one of the most important ways you can reduce your risk of cancer and other diseases.

### The research

There is strong evidence that living with overweight or obesity increases the risk of at least **12** different types of cancer: breast (in post-menopausal women), bowel, prostate (advanced only), kidney, mouth and throat, pancreatic, oesophageal (adenocarcinoma only), womb (uterus), ovarian, stomach (\*cardia only), liver and gallbladder cancer.

\*the upper part of the stomach



# Are you a healthy weight?

## Your BMI

Measuring your body mass index (BMI) is a simple way to check if you're a healthy weight for your height.

### To calculate your BMI:

1. Measure your height, in metres (1ft = 0.3m).
2. Weigh yourself, in kilograms (1 stone = 6.35kg).
3. Divide your weight by your height. Then divide your answer by your height again to work out your BMI.

Or put your details into our online BMI calculator:  
[wcrf-uk.org/bmi-calculator](http://wcrf-uk.org/bmi-calculator)



BMI	
Less than 18.5	Underweight
18.5 - 24.9	Healthy weight
25 - 29.9	Overweight
30 or more	Obese

Using BMI might not be an accurate indicator for some people, such as older people, women who are pregnant, athletes (especially those with a high amount of muscle), certain ethnic groups, and those less than 1.5m/5ft tall.



If your BMI is below 18.5, this puts you in the underweight range. Being underweight isn't good for your health. Please speak to your doctor as they can offer help and advice.

## Measuring your waist

Where we store fat in our bodies is also important. Carrying too much fat around the waist is linked to a greater risk of cancer, and also increases the risk of heart disease and type 2 diabetes.



### Measure your waist to check that it's within the healthy range:

- 1. Place the tape measure around your waist, halfway between your lowest rib and the top of your hip bone.** If you have trouble finding this point, then lean to one side and see where the skin folds. This is the point where you can measure your waist.
- 2. Make sure the tape is straight and snug, but not digging into your skin.**
- 3. Breathe normally, and measure after you have breathed out.**

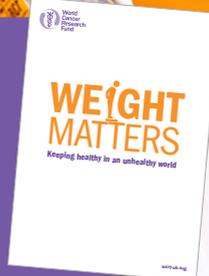


**A healthy waist measurement for all women is less than 80cm (31.5 inches), for men, less than 94cm (37 inches), and for men of African Caribbean, South Asian, Chinese and Japanese origin, less than 90cm (35.4 inches).**



For more advice on losing weight and to help stop the pounds from creeping on, check out our weight guide, **Weight Matters: keeping healthy in an unhealthy world**, at:

[wcrf-uk.org/weightmatters](http://wcrf-uk.org/weightmatters)



# Balancing your weight

Your weight is a balancing act between the energy you consume (calories from food and drink) and the energy you use (for normal bodily functions, and what you burn during physical activity).

Your weight is influenced by several factors, but, put simply, if you eat or drink more than your body needs, you will put on weight.

The reverse is also true: if you regularly use more calories (for example, through being active) than you consume through food and drink, you will start to lose weight.



## A healthy way to be the right weight

If you set yourself the goal of being a healthy weight or maintaining your current weight, **try to eat healthily rather than following a 'fad' diet or being too restrictive.**

It's also best to eat in a healthy way that suits you and fits in with your individual lifestyle, and importantly, something that you can stick to for the long-term. **Focusing on consuming healthier food and drink rather than on the number of calories can be a positive first step.**

Aim to gradually lose weight by making healthy changes to your diet and adding more activity into your day.

**Losing around 0.5–1kg (1–2lbs) a week is a realistic goal and one that you can achieve healthily.**

Once you have achieved your target weight, aim to continue eating healthily and being active to help you maintain your weight.

# Top tips to support being a healthy weight

**Try to fit more physical activity into your day and try to limit how long you spend sitting.** You can see how many calories a range of different activities uses at: [wcrf-uk.org/exercise-calculator](http://wcrf-uk.org/exercise-calculator)

**Limit how often you drink sugary drinks** such as full-sugar soft drinks, excess fruit juice and sweetened milk drinks.



**Eat more fibre-rich food** like vegetables, fruit, pulses, unsalted nuts, seeds **and wholegrains** like oats and wholemeal bread – these types of food help to make us feel fuller.



**Watch your portions** – it's not just what you eat and drink, how much is important too. Weighing out a portion of food you eat regularly, such as breakfast cereals, pasta and rice, is a good way to see how much you should be eating. Check the packet for the suggested portion weight.



**Eat slowly and stop eating when you feel full** – it takes about 20 minutes for the stomach to tell the brain it's full. Leftovers don't need to go to waste – most foods can be frozen or chilled and kept for lunch the next day.



**Use a smaller plate or bowl at mealtimes** – this can help reduce the amount you eat.

**Eat more of a 'Mediterranean type' diet** which is rich in vegetables, fruit, legumes (pulses), grains, nuts, beans, fish, and unsaturated fats such as olive oil.



**Limit how often you have junk or highly processed food** like crisps and chocolate, **and fast food**, such as fried chicken, chips and high-calorie drinks (like milkshakes).



**Read food labels** – this will help you choose food and drink which are lower in calories. To help you understand food labels, you may be interested in our guide, **Making sense of food and drink labelling**. Check it out at: [wcrf-uk.org/food-labels](http://wcrf-uk.org/food-labels)





## Recommendation 2

# Be physically active

Be physically active as part of everyday life – walk more and sit less.

Getting more physically active doesn't mean having to join a gym or spend hours exercising. There are easy ways to be active in your daily life, and the benefits can be seen in less time than you may think.

### The research

There is strong evidence that physical activity helps protect against colon, breast and womb cancer. Being physically active can also help you manage your weight. Additionally, it helps reduce the risk of many physical and mental health issues – and it helps to make us feel good!



## How much should I do?

**In the UK, the weekly physical activity guidelines for adults are:**

At least **150 minutes of moderate-intensity activity** such as brisk walking, cycling, swimming and dancing



Or **75 minutes of vigorous-intensity activity** such as running, aerobics, fast swimming and fast cycling



Or **shorter durations of very vigorous-intensity activity** such as sprinting or stair climbing



Or a **combination of moderate, vigorous and very vigorous-intensity activity**



You should also aim to do muscle-strengthening activities at least twice a week. But, any strengthening activity is better than none.

If being active for at least 150 minutes every week sounds like a lot, it's important to remember that making **any increase in your daily activity levels can make a difference to your health**. And remember, it doesn't have to be done all at once. The total can be made up of several shorter periods of activity throughout the week.

### How do I know if I'm doing moderate or vigorous-intensity activity?



**Moderate-intensity:** You can talk but not sing

**Vigorous-intensity:** You can't say more than a few words without pausing for a breath

# Getting started

**Step 1: Look at what you are already doing.** Complete the physical activity diary on the next page to help you work out where you can do more. For example, walking for longer, or slightly faster.

**Step 2: Build up to 150 minutes of moderate-intensity activity.** For example, if you enjoy walking, start by doing a 10-minute walk every day for a week or two, then increase it to 15 minutes every day.

**Step 3: Mix it up.** Once your fitness starts to improve, why not try doing different activities, such as yoga, Pilates, swimming, cycling or dancing.

## Make it a habit

Changing a few daily habits can soon make you more active. For example, walking to the shops instead of driving, using the stairs whenever you can and breaking up periods of sitting by standing and moving around more. Making a few changes in your everyday life can have a big impact on your health.

## Sitting less

As well as moving more, it's important to limit sedentary time – this means, if possible, not sitting or lying down more than necessary, when not sleeping.

If you spend lots of time sitting down, try to take regular standing breaks (if you can) and do some light activity such as moving around or some light stretching. Even if you do regular strenuous activity, it is still important to reduce how long you spend sitting.



**We have strong evidence that excess screen time** (time spent doing sedentary activities like watching television or using a computer) **contributes to weight gain, overweight and obesity.**



If you have a health condition that may prevent you from being physically active, check with your doctor or health professional first; otherwise, your age and current level of fitness shouldn't stop you from being active.



	ACTIVITY	DURATION
MONDAY	Eg 12.30pm - walk around the block	15 minutes
TUESDAY		
WEDNESDAY		
THURSDAY		
FRIDAY		
SATURDAY		
SUNDAY		

To record more weeks, email us at [resources@wcrf.org](mailto:resources@wcrf.org) for a blank copy.

# Mix up your movement

It's important to do different types of activity. Each week, try to do a mix of the following:

## Aerobic exercise

Also known as cardiovascular or cardio for short. This includes exercises such as brisk walking, jogging, cycling and swimming.

**This type of exercise helps to keep our heart, lungs, and blood vessels healthy.** Our research has shown that this type of exercise helps to **protect against weight gain, overweight and obesity.**



## Muscle-strengthening activities

**These types of exercise work our muscles against weight or resistance and help keep your muscles and bones healthy.** This includes using free weights, resistance bands, or exercises that use your body weight like push-ups, sit-ups and squats. It also includes activities such as yoga and heavy gardening, like digging and shovelling.



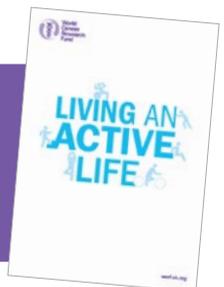
## Flexibility and balance

Including movements such as stretching helps to keep our muscles flexible and healthy. Stretching may help to **reduce the risk of injury, reduce muscle tightness and increase joint mobility.** Balance exercises such as yoga and other specific movements are also important, especially as you get older, to help reduce the risk of falls.



For more support on getting more active, our guide, **Living an active life**, is packed full of practical tips and advice to help you move more and fit more activity into your day:

[wcrf-uk.org/activelife](http://wcrf-uk.org/activelife)



# Top tips for getting more active

**Start slowly and gradually increase how much you do.**

## Do what you enjoy

It's better to do an activity you enjoy than try to force yourself to do something because you think you should.



## Get active together

Getting your friends, family or neighbours involved can be a great way to make it more enjoyable.



## Get active at home

If you have stairs, you could walk up and down the stairs or use the bottom stair to step up and down. If you are speaking on the phone, stand up and move around, or why not try marching on the spot.

## Give yourself a reminder

If you are at home or work, use your mobile phone or computer to set a reminder to move more. Try to get up and move every 30-60 minutes.



## Do what fits into your lifestyle

If you're a morning person, try getting up earlier to fit some activity in before your day starts.



## Get active at work

Have a stroll through the office or get up to speak to your work colleague rather than emailing. Wherever you work, use your lunch break to get active. Maybe you have a gym nearby where you can go for a swim or attend a class, or you could put on your trainers and go for a brisk walk.



## Active transport

Instead of using public transport or driving, try cycling, jogging or power walking for all or part of your journey.



## Remember the positives

Such as feeling fitter, more energised, relaxed, self-confident, happy, healthier – and the long-term health benefits it brings.





### Recommendation 3

## Eat a diet rich in wholegrains, vegetables, fruit and beans

Make wholegrains, vegetables, fruit, and pulses (legumes) such as beans and lentils a major part of your usual daily diet.

### The research

Eating a fibre-rich diet, high in wholegrains, can help protect against **weight gain, overweight and obesity**. It can also help to lower the calories in every meal so your meals will keep you feeling fuller for longer on fewer calories, which can help you maintain a healthy weight.

A diet rich in fibre and wholegrains can help protect against **bowel (colorectal) cancer**. There's also evidence that vegetables and fruit can help protect against cancers of the mouth and throat and digestive tract.



# Reshape your plate

Reshaping your plate will help you to eat more wholegrains, vegetables, fruit and pulses. For a healthy, balanced meal, at least three-quarters of your plate should be made up of these types of food, and a quarter of protein-rich food.

## What should make up most of your plate

**3/4** (or more) **wholegrains, pulses, vegetables and fruit**

**1/4** (or less) **lean meat, poultry, fish** (white and oily), or **plant-based protein sources** such as soya



## Wholegrains

Include food such as **brown rice, wholemeal pasta, wholemeal bread, oats** and **unsweetened wholegrain cereal**. Making simple swaps to include more wholegrains adds more nutrients and fibre to your diet.



## Vegetables and fruit

**Fresh, frozen, dried** and **canned in water or natural juices** all count towards your **5 A DAY** (but not potatoes). Vegetables and fruit contain fibre, a range of essential vitamins and minerals, and compounds called phytonutrients. These are found naturally in plant-based food like vegetables and fruit and may be beneficial to our health.



## Pulses

Include **lentils, peas** and **beans** like kidney beans and black-eyed beans. **Canned, frozen** and **dried** all count towards your **5 A DAY**. Pulses are naturally low in fat, high in fibre, contain a range of different vitamins and minerals, and are also a good source of plant-based protein – important in our diet, especially if you don't eat meat, poultry, fish or dairy products. They're also a healthy and cheaper alternative if you want to eat less red meat.



# What is a 5 A DAY portion?

Fresh, frozen or canned (in water or natural juice) all count. Look for canned products with no added sugar or salt.

**One portion weighs 80g, which is roughly the same as:**

**3 heaped tablespoons of vegetables**

(excluding potatoes), like carrots



**3–4 heaped tablespoons of cooked or canned pulses**, like beans, peas or lentils



**1 cereal bowl of salad leaves**, like lettuce



**1 medium whole fruit**, like an apple



**2 small whole fruits**, like plums



**1 slice of large fruit**, like melon



**1–2 handfuls of berries**, like raspberries or blueberries



**1 heaped tablespoon (30g) of dried fruit**, like sultanas or raisins



**1 small glass (150ml) of unsweetened fruit or vegetable juice or smoothie**



- ▶ A portion of fruit, vegetable juice, smoothie or pulses only counts as one of your 5 A DAY no matter how much you have.
- ▶ Dried fruit should only be eaten at mealtimes and not as a between-meal snack, to reduce the risk of tooth decay.

Why not download our handy **5 A DAY portion** poster?

Available at: [wcrf-uk.org/5ADAY](http://wcrf-uk.org/5ADAY)



# Top tips for fitting in your 5 A DAY

**For breakfast:** add chopped banana or berries to your cereal or porridge; slices of pear or nectarine to low-fat natural yoghurt; or try grilled mushrooms, tomatoes and spinach.



**See what's in season.** Seasonal vegetables and fruit can often be cheaper and better for the environment.

Instead of potatoes, **try roasting sweet potatoes, squash or parsnips** in a little oil brushed or sprayed on.



**Stock up on canned or frozen vegetables** so you always have them to hand – you can buy them pre-cut for easy cooking. They also tend to be cheaper than fresh but are just as nutritious.



If you're cooking soups, sauces, chilli or stews from scratch, stir in grated carrot, courgette or spinach. Or, try chopping a variety of vegetables into small pieces or blending them.



**Swap your normal snack** for a piece of fruit or cut carrots, peppers or celery for a crunchy afternoon snack.



For a quick and easy pudding, **try stewing or microwaving fruit** like plums, apples (thinly sliced) or rhubarb with a sprinkle of cinnamon or drop of vanilla essence. Serve with low-fat natural yoghurt and toasted oats.



**If vegetables and fruit have passed their best, make them into a juice, smoothie or soup.** Even salad leaves can be blended into soup.



Eating healthily can be tasty, simple and affordable. For lots of nutritious and easy to make recipes, why not have a look at the recipes on our website: [wcrf-uk.org/recipes](http://wcrf-uk.org/recipes)



## Recommendation 4

# Limit consumption of 'fast foods' and other processed foods high in fat, starches or sugars

Limiting these foods helps control calorie intake and maintain a healthy weight.

'Fast food' includes food such as burgers, chips, pizza and fried chicken. Processed food is often high in fat, starches or sugar, like chocolate, biscuits, cakes and crisps.

Even small amounts of these foods can contain lots of calories and are typically higher in fat, saturated fat (a type of fat we should try to eat less of), sugar and salt. They also provide little in the way of vitamins, minerals and fibre. Though it can be hard to resist sometimes, **it's important to not have these foods as part of your everyday diet.**

### The research

There is strong evidence that eating greater amounts of these types of food can lead to weight gain, overweight and obesity. Eating a 'Western type' diet (a diet that contains high amounts of sugars, meat and fat) also increases the risk of weight gain, and becoming overweight or obese, which in turn increases the risk of many common cancers.



## What should I eat instead?

The best way to keep your calories in check is to eat lower calorie food such as vegetables, fruit, pulses, wholegrains and lean proteins.

Some high-calorie food, like oily fish, avocado, unsalted nuts and seeds contain healthier fats and are a good source of certain vitamins and minerals. This means that they can be eaten in moderation as part of a healthy diet.



### Top tips to cut your calories:

- ▶ **Compare food labels.** Comparing food labels of similar food can help you choose the lower-calorie option. It is also a great way to see the amount of fat, saturated fat, sugar and salt a portion of food (or drink) contains.
- ▶ **Trim the fat off meat,** or better still, opt for skinless poultry (chicken or turkey), or white fish.
- ▶ Instead of processed breakfast cereals that can often be quite high in sugar and salt, **opt for unsweetened wholegrain versions.** They are higher in fibre so will help you feel fuller for longer.
- ▶ **Opt for unsweetened dairy,** for example, yoghurts can often contain a lot of added sugar.
- ▶ Instead of junk food like crisps and chocolate, **opt for healthier snacks such as unsalted nuts and seeds, plain popcorn, wholemeal pitta with natural peanut butter or vegetable sticks** like peppers or carrots with hummus.
- ▶ **Try to cook from scratch** more often rather than using takeaways or pre-packaged meals.
- ▶ **Write shopping lists.** It's a good way to stick to what you planned to buy and not get swayed by deals on junk and ultra-processed food.
- ▶ **Avoid going shopping when you're hungry** – those snacks you're trying to avoid will look a lot more appealing when you've got a rumbling stomach.

## Recommendation 5

# Limit consumption of red and processed meat

Eat no more than moderate amounts of red meat, such as beef, pork and lamb. Eat little, if any, processed meat.

Meat, especially red meat, is often seen as the star of a meal but there are lots of good reasons for shifting focus to wholegrains, vegetables, fruit and pulses.

## What is red meat?

It includes meat such as beef, veal, pork, lamb, mutton, and goat. Red meat is a good source of nutrients such as protein, vitamin B12, iron and zinc, so it can form part of a healthy, balanced diet, but we don't need to eat it every day.

### The research

Having a diet high in red meat can increase the risk of bowel cancer. Eating lots of meat is also one characteristic of a 'Western-type' diet which our evidence shows increases the risk of weight gain.



## Red meat – how much a week?

Here's an example of how you could have three meals a week containing red meat and still stick to less than 350g (cooked weight):

- ▶ **Spaghetti bolognese with minced beef – 140g**  
(about 210g raw weight)
- ▶ **Small pork or lamb chop – 75g**  
(about 110g raw weight)
- ▶ **Roast beef, pork or lamb – 90g**  
(about 130g raw weight)

**Aim for no more than about three portions of red meat a week, which is about 350–500g cooked weight in total (or 525–750g raw weight)**



## What can I eat instead?

- ▶ **Poultry** – eg skinless chicken and turkey.
- ▶ **Non-oily fish** – eg cod, pollock and tuna (fresh, frozen and canned all count).
- ▶ **Oily fish** – eg salmon, trout, sardines and mackerel (fresh, frozen and canned all count).
- ▶ **Plant-based protein sources** – like tofu and tempeh. Or **meat-substitutes** such as Quorn.
- ▶ **Pulses** – eg broad beans, lentils and chickpeas.

## What is processed meat?

This is meat that has been preserved by smoking, curing, salting or adding preservatives rather than having just been cooked or reformed. This includes bacon, salami, chorizo, corned beef, pepperoni, pastrami, hot dogs, all types of ham and most ready-to-buy sausages and burgers.

### The research

There is strong evidence that processed meat increases the risk of **bowel cancer**, so we recommend eating very little, if any. It also tends to be high in fat, especially saturated fat and salt.



### Top tips to cut down:

- ▶ **Eating smaller portions** (about half the size of your hand) means you can have red meat more often and still have no more than 350–500g a week.
- ▶ **Swap beef mince for turkey or even soya mince.** Pulses are a great swap as well. Even if you only swap half, you'll cut calories and it's just as filling.
- ▶ **Keep some days red meat-free.**
- ▶ **Make red meat go further** by adding some beans, chickpeas, lentils or mushrooms to bulk up stews, chillies and pasta sauces. This can also lower the calories in your meal, adds fibre, and counts towards your 5 A DAY.
- ▶ **Cook with smoked paprika instead of chorizo** for a flavour kick.

## Recommendation 6

# Limit consumption of sugar-sweetened drinks

Drink mostly water and unsweetened drinks.



While we can often think about the calories we eat, it can be easy to forget about the calories we drink. In fact, what we drink can affect our health just as much as the food we eat.

If you regularly drink sugar-sweetened drinks, or drink them in large portions – which can be easy to do as they aren't very filling, despite being quite high in calories – it can lead to your weight increasing. Instead, **it's best to drink water, lower-fat milk, sugar-free drinks, and unsweetened tea and coffee.**

### The research

There is strong evidence that sugary drinks – such as cola, lemonade, and juices – **can cause weight gain**. And we know that living with overweight or obesity increases the risk of many types of cancer.



## What about artificially-sweetened or 'diet' drinks?

Artificially-sweetened drinks can help people cut down on their sugar intake. But the evidence that these help prevent weight gain is not consistent. Also, they are quite acidic, which can be bad for our teeth, so it's best not to drink them regularly or in large quantities.

### The research

Large studies have shown that there is **no strong evidence to link artificial sweeteners to cancer risk.**



## What about juices and smoothies?

Pure, unsweetened fruit juice, vegetable juice and smoothies are a healthier option as they contain essential nutrients such as vitamin C, folate and potassium. However, they are often high in sugar.

These type of drinks also lack the fibre that is found in whole vegetables and fruit. When vegetables and fruit are blended, the sugars become 'free sugars' – which can cause tooth decay.

**Drinking a total of 150ml unsweetened juices and smoothies can count as one of your 5 A DAY – but only counts once no matter how much you drink.**



### Top tips to cut down on sugar-sweetened drinks:

- ▶ **Swap sugary soft drinks for diet versions**, or better still, sparkling mineral water with a slice of lemon, lime or cucumber.
- ▶ **Check the label.** Even healthier drinks like flavoured water can sometimes be high in sugar. Look for drinks labelled sugar-free or low sugar.
- ▶ **Avoid adding syrups, sugar or whipped cream to coffees or hot chocolate.** Ask for sugar-free syrup options, skimmed milk and order a small size.
- ▶ Instead of a large glass of fruit juice, **pour a small portion and dilute the juice** with plain water or sparkling mineral water.
- ▶ **Try herbal or fruit tea** – they come in a range of flavours and most are sugar-free.
- ▶ Rather than hot chocolate, mochas and coffees flavoured with syrups, **opt for skinny versions of less milky hot drinks** like cappuccinos (without chocolate), americanos or tea to cut the calories and sugar.

## Recommendation 7

# Limit alcohol consumption

For cancer prevention, it's best not to drink alcohol.



Whether it's a glass of wine with a meal, or a pint of beer at the end of a busy day, for many of us, drinking alcohol can become part of day-to-day life. While the immediate effects of drinking alcohol are obvious, we often don't think about the longer-term impact on our health.

To reduce your cancer risk as much as possible, we recommend not drinking alcohol at all. If you do choose to drink alcohol, the UK guidelines for men and women is to drink no more than 14 units a week, spread over at least three days. And remember, no alcoholic drink is healthy.

### The research

There is strong scientific evidence that all alcoholic drinks can increase the risk of six cancers: mouth and throat, oesophageal, breast, bowel, stomach and liver cancer.

For cancer prevention, there is no safe limit to how much alcohol you can drink, as even small amounts of alcoholic drinks can increase the risk of cancer. All types of alcohol (whether beers, wines, spirits (liquors) or any other drinks) increase the risk of cancer.

For some cancer types, alcohol is particularly harmful if you also smoke.



### What is a unit?

One unit contains 10ml or 8g of pure alcohol.

**One bottle of lager/beer/cider** (330ml, 5% ABV) is **1.7 units**



**One 25ml measure of spirits** (40% ABV)

such as vodka or whisky is **1 unit**



**One small** (125ml) **glass of wine** (12% ABV) is **1.5 units**



## Alcohol and weight gain

Alcoholic drinks are surprisingly high in calories, they also lack the essential nutrients that your body needs. The extra calories can quickly add up, leading to weight gain.

Drinking alcohol can also cause us to be tempted by food higher in fat and salt – leading to more calories. Drinking less and changing what you drink can be really helpful if you're watching your weight.

- ▶ **A pint of 4% lager** contains about **180 calories** – similar to **1 average sausage roll**
- ▶ **A 175ml glass of wine (13% alcohol)** contains about **160 calories** – similar to **2 chocolate digestives**



Find out how many calories are in other alcoholic drinks:

[wcrf-uk.org/alcohol-calculator](https://www.wcrf-uk.org/alcohol-calculator)



### Top tips for savvy drinking:

- ▶ If you're thirsty, **have a glass of water or sugar-free squash** to quench your thirst.
- ▶ **Alternate** between alcohol and water or sugar-free soft drinks.
- ▶ **Finish your drink** before topping up your glass.
- ▶ **Dilute your drinks** – for example, opt for a small wine spritzer with soda water rather than a large glass of wine.
- ▶ **Sip your drinks.** Try to avoid drinking too quickly.
- ▶ **Keep a few alcohol-free days each week.**

- ▶ **Avoid eating salty snacks** – they can make you thirsty and encourage you to drink more.
- ▶ **Choose low-alcohol or alcohol-free options.** 'Low-alcohol drinks' refers to drinks that have an 'alcoholic strength by volume' (ABV) between 0.5% and 1.2%. Choosing lower strength options means you have fewer units of alcohol per drink and tend to have fewer calories.

For ideas on alcohol-free drinks, have a look at some of our mocktail recipes: [wcrf-uk.org/drinks](https://www.wcrf-uk.org/drinks)



## Recommendation 8

# Do not use supplements for cancer prevention

Aim to meet nutritional needs through diet alone.

We advise against taking supplements to reduce your cancer risk. Instead, **it's best where possible to meet your nutritional needs by eating a healthy, balanced diet.** Whole foods provide more than just vitamins and minerals. For example, they contain fibre, which is important for digestive health.

Some supplements can support our daily nutritional requirements but some are in doses that far exceed levels that would be consumed by eating food with these nutrients in.

### The research

**There is strong evidence that some high-dose supplements can actually be harmful.** As the effect of other supplements on cancer risk is unclear, it is best not to use them to protect against cancer.



## What are supplements?

Supplements contain vitamins, minerals, other components of food including phytochemicals such as lycopene (found in tomatoes), herbs, and plant compounds such as ginseng, garlic and green tea. They can be in a pill, capsule, powder or liquid form.



## Who may benefit from supplements?

Most people can get all the nutrients their body needs by eating a healthy, balanced diet. But, there are times where certain vitamins and minerals are recommended. For example:



**During the autumn and winter months, the UK government recommends all adults and children over 5 years old take a daily ten microgram vitamin D supplement.**

If you have darker skin or are not exposed to much sun (for example, if you're housebound or choose to cover your skin), you are more likely to have lower vitamin D levels. Therefore, you should make sure you have enough vitamin D through diet or supplements.



**Women who are trying for a baby or are in the first 12 weeks of their pregnancy** are advised to take a folic acid supplement.



**Frail, older people with a poor appetite** may benefit from certain supplements.



**People with bowel diseases or those who are being treated for or have survived cancer** may not be able to absorb enough nutrients from their diet or to eat a normal diet, so they may also benefit from certain supplements. In such cases, a doctor or dietitian will be able to provide advice or support.



If you think you may be low or lacking in certain vitamins and minerals, you should only add certain supplements into your diet on the advice of your doctor or a dietitian.



## Recommendation 9

# For mothers: breastfeed your baby, if you can

Breastfeeding is good for both mother and baby.

**Breastfeeding is a personal choice but there are many benefits for you and your baby if you choose to breastfeed.**

If you are able to, it is best to only give your baby breast milk for the first six months of life. After that, your baby will benefit if you continue to breastfeed for up to two years or beyond, alongside introducing other food and water. Even if you can't do this, **any breastfeeding is beneficial for you and your baby.** The longer you breastfeed, the longer the protection lasts and the greater the benefits.

### The research

Breastfed babies are also less likely to become children with overweight or obesity compared to babies who are not breastfed.

Being overweight or living with obesity in childhood tends to lead to being overweight or living with obesity in adult life. As this is a cause of cancer, helping your baby to be a healthy weight when they grow up means you can help reduce their risk of developing cancer in the future.

## What are the benefits for your baby?

Breast milk is the best start for your baby as it contains all the nutrients your baby needs for healthy growth and development in the first six months. Breastfeeding can also help you and your baby to bond.

## What are the benefits for you?

Breastfeeding may also protect against breast cancer by:

- ▶ Lowering the levels of some cancer-related hormones in your body.
- ▶ Getting rid of any cells in your breasts that may have DNA damage.

For further advice, information and support about breastfeeding, visit [nhs.uk/start4life/baby/breastfeeding](https://www.nhs.uk/start4life/baby/breastfeeding)

## Recommendation 10

# After a cancer diagnosis: follow our recommendations, if you can

Check with your health professional what is right for you.

Thanks to improved treatments, more and more people are surviving a cancer diagnosis. If you have had cancer, after treatment, we encourage (if appropriate and not otherwise advised by a health professional) to follow the Cancer Prevention Recommendations outlined in the guide.

Following the Recommendations is also likely to reduce the risk of other diseases, like heart disease and type 2 diabetes, which are important causes of ill health in people living beyond cancer.

If you have finished your cancer treatment, you may be interested in our guide, **Healthy Living After Cancer**.

Check it out at: [wcrf-uk.org/hlac](http://wcrf-uk.org/hlac)

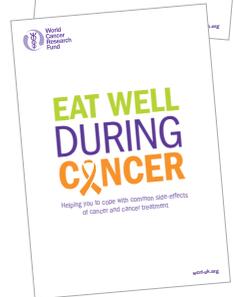
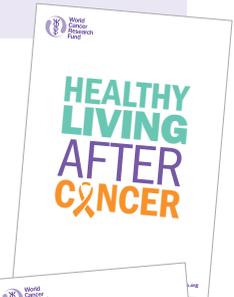
## Still receiving treatment?

If you are currently having treatment for cancer, you might have special nutritional needs. Our **Eat Well During Cancer** booklet has tips and advice to help you cope with common side-effects while also eating as healthily as possible.

Check it out at: [wcrf-uk.org/ewdc](http://wcrf-uk.org/ewdc)

### The research

It's unlikely that following the Cancer Prevention Recommendations would be harmful to people who have completed their treatment.



You may also have special nutritional needs if your treatment has affected your ability to eat or digest some foods. For example, if you have had a gastrectomy or a colostomy. In these cases, it's best to speak to a health professional, such as a doctor, dietitian or specialist nurse for advice on your specific nutritional needs.

# Making healthy changes stick

Now you have seen our Recommendations and the simple changes you can make. Sometimes the hardest part is doing it – and sticking with your new habits.

## Find your motivation

To make healthy changes stick, it's useful to focus on a reason for making changes – whether it's helping to reduce the risk of cancer or to just help improve your health for your family – you can use this as your motivation.

**Write down what your motivation is and put it somewhere you will often see it.** For example, on the front of the fridge. If you find your motivation slipping, remind yourself why you are making those changes in the first place.

## Starting small

While you may be tempted to change lots of things straight away, it's important to start small. You might start by having fewer days drinking alcohol or drinking more water instead of sugar-sweetened drinks.

When one change becomes a habit, try introducing another area of your lifestyle you want to change. Over time, you may be surprised at just how many new healthier changes you have made – and hopefully you will be feeling healthier for it!

**Whatever changes you make should fit in with your day-to-day life, and something that you can see yourself doing in the long-term.**

We are all human, so if you slip up it is perfectly normal. The main thing is to accept this is part of the change process. **One slip-up doesn't have to mean going back to your old habits or giving up.** Just give yourself a gentle reminder of why you are making those changes in the first place. Good luck!



# Other advice you might find helpful

World Cancer Research Fund is dedicated to helping people reduce their risk of developing cancer by following our Cancer Prevention Recommendations. We also provide advice to people who are living with and beyond a cancer diagnosis, to help them live long, healthy lives and to reduce their risk of developing cancer again.

Visit our website [wcrf-uk.org](https://www.wcrf-uk.org) or call us on **020 7343 4205** for more information.

## General diet and lifestyle information

- ▶ For **general healthy living** information, visit [nhs.uk/livewell](https://www.nhs.uk/livewell)
- ▶ For further information on **getting more active**, visit [nhs.uk/live-well/exercise](https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/exercise)
- ▶ To find information on **NHS Cancer Screening Programmes**, visit [gov.uk/topic/population-screening-programmes](https://www.gov.uk/topic/population-screening-programmes)
- ▶ For any concerns about **alcohol and drinking** or to get support, visit [nhs.uk/live-well/alcohol-support](https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/alcohol-support)



## About World Cancer Research Fund

World Cancer Research Fund is one of the world's leading cancer prevention charities, and the only UK charity solely dedicated to funding life-changing research into the prevention and survival of cancer through diet and lifestyle.

We know that around four in ten – or 40 per cent – of cancer cases are preventable. That's around 147,000 people every year in the UK. Our vision is that preventable cancers in the UK are halved by 2050. By following our Cancer Prevention Recommendations, choosing not to smoke (or giving up smoking) and being safe in the sun, you will have the best chance of living a life free from the disease. Find out more: [wcrf-uk.org/our-research](https://wcrf-uk.org/our-research)

**Will you help us build a world where fewer people every day get preventable cancers?** Our work is funded solely by charitable donations. Your support will help us continue providing easy to access health information to help people reduce their risk of cancer: [wcrf-uk.org/donate](https://wcrf-uk.org/donate)



We're always looking for ways to improve the information we provide. If you have any comments or suggestions about any aspect of this guide or our other health information, or for any enquiries or to request the information in large print, please contact us at [resources@wcrf.org](mailto:resources@wcrf.org)

### World Cancer Research Fund

140 Pentonville Road, London N1 9FW

Tel: **020 7343 4200**

Email: [resources@wcrf.org](mailto:resources@wcrf.org)

[wcrf-uk.org](https://wcrf-uk.org)



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Next review date: September 2024 WEF9TW



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