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HEALTHY  
LIVING  
AFTER  
CANCER

Dear reader,

I never dreamt that I would one day be on a cancer journey. From the day I discovered that lump in my breast, to today, it has been and continues to be a journey filled with highs and lows.

I don't think I can easily forget the day when I was told of the biopsy results. It is true, time seemed to stop and a numbness took over. I think I said the most unlikely thing when I finally spoke. I said what came naturally to me when faced with a challenge – “take them both off.” I was determined in that moment that I would be practical. Here was a life-changing challenge and I was going to fight to stay alive and healthy.

As a healthcare professional, the tables were turned on me when I became a cancer patient; attending hospitals for scans, biopsies, surgery and follow-ups. I had to learn to be a patient and that was very difficult to do.

I bear the physical, surgical scars but they have not redefined who I am. I lost my hip-length dreadlocks and it took me a while to accept that I ought to tap into the supportive resources which were available to me. I was determined to do things my way. I did not want a cancer diagnosis with a good prognosis be all that my life amounted to; no way!

If I can, anyone can. Cancer is a condition which does not necessarily mean that life has ground to a halt. I joked with my mother that I can now wear certain styles I shied away from in the past.

I keep looking forward with excitement to this new chapter in my life story. I encourage all who are on their own cancer journey to keep doing the same!

**Tricia Zenisa George**

Breast cancer survivor and WCRF supporter



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“

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”

A photograph of Tricia Zenisa George, a Black woman with a short haircut, smiling warmly. She is wearing a white, long-sleeved, textured top and a gold necklace. She is sitting in a lush garden, surrounded by green foliage and flowers. In the foreground, there is a glass bowl filled with bright red cherry tomatoes. The background is slightly blurred, showing more of the garden and a person's hand in the distance.

**Tricia Zenisa George**

Breast cancer survivor and WCRF supporter

Read more about her story: [wcrf-uk.org/tricia-george](https://wcrf-uk.org/tricia-george)

# Life after cancer

Being told that you have cancer can be life-changing, and, regardless of your experience, you're bound to feel a sense of relief when your treatment ends. Over time, most people regain some sense of normality. However, recovery can take time, and learning to manage the worry that cancer might return may take some time too.

One way to take a positive step forward is to take control of your health. This can be done by making healthy choices about the **food you eat, what you drink** and how **physically active** you are. These steps can help to make you feel good, have more energy and help improve your health and wellbeing. Being able to do something to help protect yourself against getting cancer again can also be an important part of the mental battle.

After cancer, there may also be anxieties about what to eat, which is often made worse by the conflicting and mixed messages about what diet and lifestyle advice people should be following.

## How diet and lifestyle affect cancer survival

There is growing evidence that if you eat a healthy diet, are a healthy weight and are physically active, you can help reduce your risk of getting cancer again and help improve your overall health. A healthy diet and lifestyle may also help people have a better quality of life after cancer.

Further scientific studies are needed before we can fully understand the role of diet and lifestyle on cancer risk in cancer survivors.

Based on the available evidence, we recommend that, after treatment, cancer survivors follow our **Cancer Prevention Recommendations** (see page 43) unless they are unable to or have been advised otherwise by a doctor, dietitian or specialist nurse.

You can find out more  
about our research at:  
[wcrf-uk.org/our-research](https://wcrf-uk.org/our-research)



## Better survival rates

Thanks to improved treatments, the number of cancer survivors has increased in recent decades and is predicted to continue to rise. **Around 50 per cent of those diagnosed with cancer will live for at least ten years after diagnosis.** However, some cancers have a lower survival rate than others.

There are also some differences in survival rates in people from BAME (Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic) groups, and there is growing research to understand this.

The number of people living beyond a cancer diagnosis in the UK is currently estimated at around **2 million people**. It is predicted to increase in the UK and is estimated that by **2040** nearly **a quarter of people aged over 65 years** will be a **cancer survivor**.

As more and more people are surviving cancer thanks to improved treatments and earlier diagnosis, it becomes increasingly important to find ways to help people live well after a cancer diagnosis.

## Be well informed

After cancer treatment, people often choose to make changes to their diet and lifestyle. For some, these can be quite drastic changes, while others may take a gentler approach by making smaller changes.

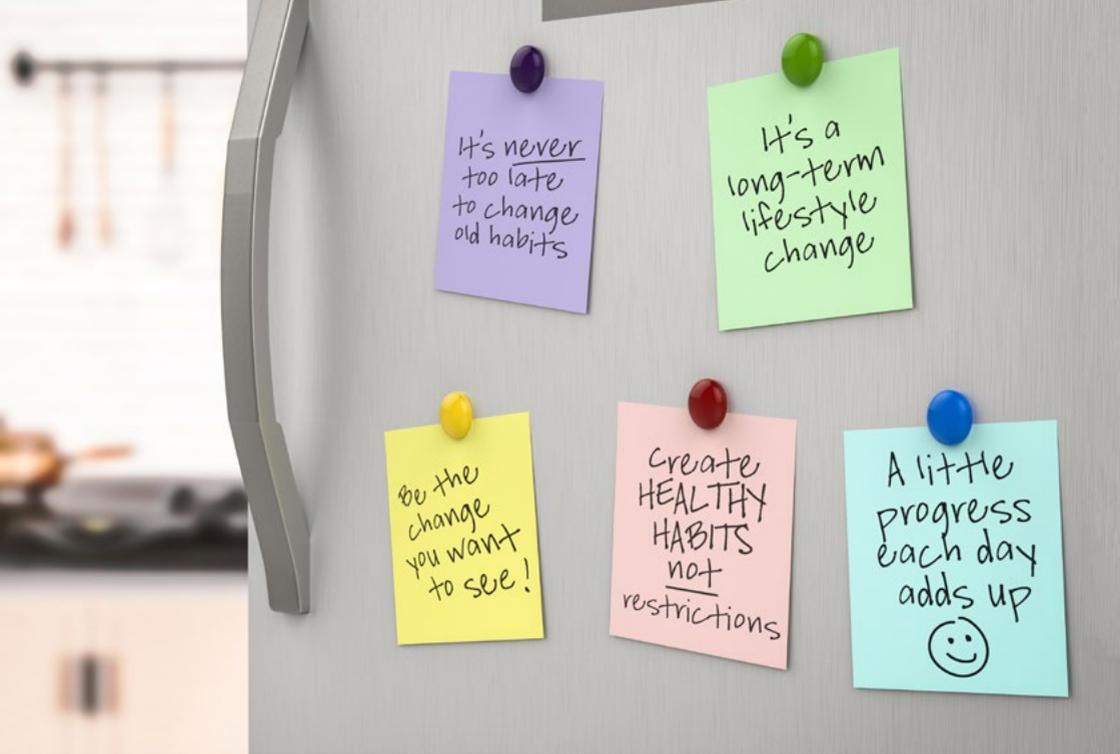
If you decide there are changes you can make, it is important to make changes based on sound scientific evidence. This can be difficult as countless books and websites promise to reveal the secrets to beating and preventing cancer, often by following extreme diets or taking various supplements (often at very high doses).

In reality, there's no need to cut out certain food groups, consume special foods or take certain supplements (such as high dose single nutrients), unless recommended by your doctor, dietitian or specialist nurse.

**The information in this guide is based on the latest scientific evidence and is aimed at those who have finished and recovered from cancer treatment. However, for some cancers, the recovery is not total and you may be affected long-term by your treatment. The information in this guide is general, and not specific to any cancer type.**



If you are unsure whether this advice is suitable for you, it is best to check with your doctor, dietitian, or specialist nurse first.



## Making healthy changes

The key to making lasting changes to your diet and lifestyle is to start small. While we may want to change everything immediately, it's important to start small. It's these small changes that add up over time, it can also mean you are more likely to keep them up as well.

Many of us know what we should be doing, for example, eating more fruit and vegetables, and getting more physical activity into our daily lives. However, this can sometimes be easier said than done. To help make healthy changes stick, it can be useful to have a reason for making changes – whether that is helping to reduce the risk of your cancer returning or to just get back to better health – you can use this as your motivation.

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



There may be habits you want to change, such as having that extra glass of wine at the end of the day. Think about what habits you want to change, once written down you can then try to commit to them.

**Pick one habit you want to change and focus on that first.** Once a new healthy habit becomes automatic, try to incorporate another. It's this gradual building of healthy habits into your daily life that can make a difference to your health and how you feel.

It can also be valuable to have someone to support you on your journey, whether that is your spouse, partner, friend or family.

Remember, that when you are making changes to your diet and lifestyle, it's going to take time for them to become automatic. We can all slip up, but this doesn't mean going back to your old habits. Just re-focus and **give yourself a gentle reminder of why you are making those changes in the first place.** It can also be a time to remind yourself of how far you have come.

### Habits I want to change:



1

2

3

## Food, drink and activity diaries

The first step is to look at what you are already doing. Fill in the food and drink, and physical activity diaries to help you work out where you can make positive changes to your diet and lifestyle.

Use the diaries on the next page to write down what you eat and drink, as well as all the physical activity you have done for the week. To record more weeks, please email us at [resources@wcrf.org](mailto:resources@wcrf.org) for a blank copy.



## FOOD AND DRINK DIARY



Eg. 9.30am - two slices of toast with spread, glass of orange juice, cup of tea

MONDAY

TUESDAY

WEDNESDAY

THURSDAY

FRIDAY

SATURDAY

SUNDAY



## PHYSICAL ACTIVITY DIARY



Eg. 12.30pm - 15-minute walk around the block

MONDAY

TUESDAY

WEDNESDAY

THURSDAY

FRIDAY

SATURDAY

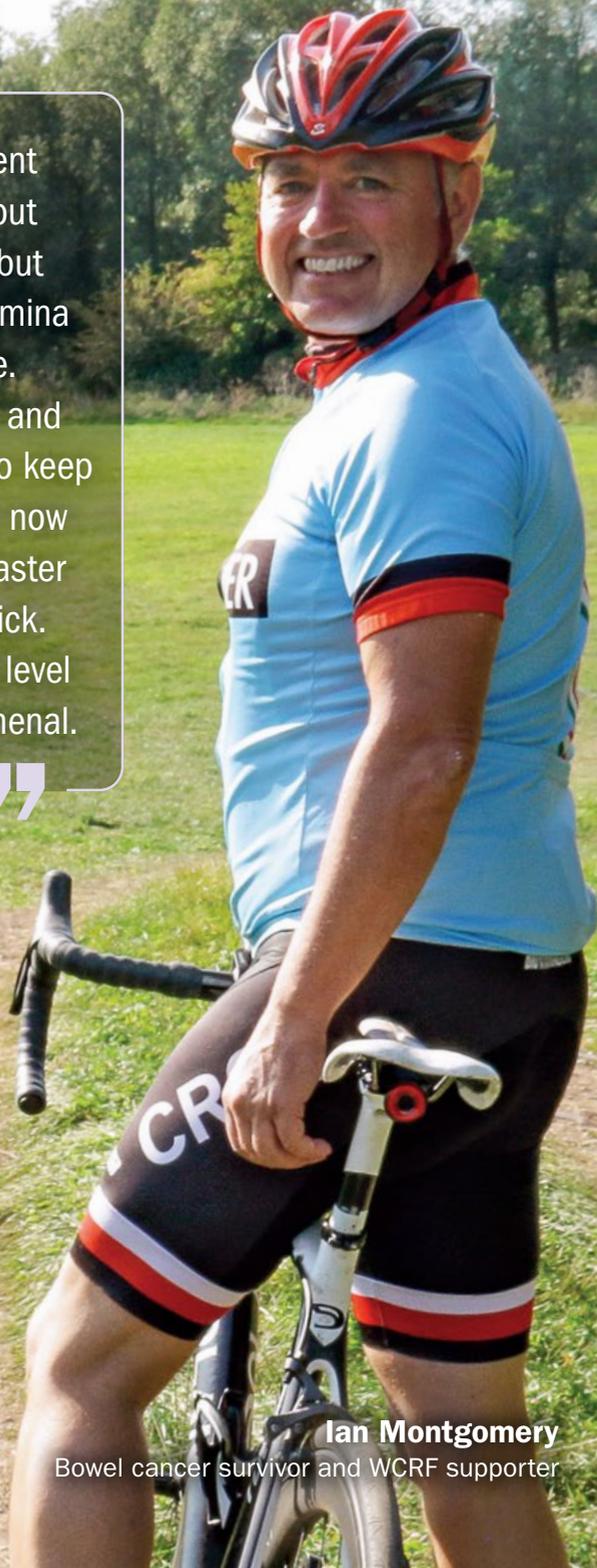
SUNDAY

“

During my treatment I was able to get out and keep cycling, but my strength and stamina weren't the same.

But I made positive and conscious decisions to keep exercising, and I am now able to cycle even faster than before I got sick. Getting back to that level is absolutely phenomenal.

”



**Ian Montgomery**

Bowel cancer survivor and WCRF supporter

# Getting more active

It's normal to become less active during cancer treatment, but once you have recovered and you're given the 'go-ahead', you can start to build up your activity levels. You should aim to be as physically active as your physical ability allows, and where possible try to limit time spent being inactive.

## Making a start

Becoming more active can be difficult if you are recovering from cancer treatment or haven't been physically active for some time. Depending upon the type of cancer you have recovered from, you may find that it is difficult for you to do what you were doing before, but **getting a bit more activity and movement into your daily life can make a real difference to how you feel – mentally and physically.**

Even though you may find it hard to get yourself motivated, just remind yourself that you will feel better for it. The most important thing is working well within your abilities and not pushing yourself – listen to your body.

### 10 reasons to keep active

- 1 Reduces your risk** of developing certain cancers, type 2 diabetes, stroke and heart disease.
- Helps maintain or improve **physical function** (your ability to get things done in your life).
- Helps to **strengthen your bones** (with impact or weight-bearing exercises).
- Helps to support your **immune system**.
- Helps to protect against and manage **depression**.
- Helps to manage **stress** and **anxiety**.
- Helps to improve your **mood** and overall **wellbeing**.
- Helps to improve **sleep**.
- Helps to improve **fitness, strength, flexibility** and **mobility**.
- Helps to **rebuild muscle** (with strengthening exercises).



## 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 or cycling



Or **75 minutes of vigorous-intensity activity** such as running



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



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



The talk test is a simple and helpful guide to measure how hard you are working. If you can talk but not sing, then it is likely you are doing moderate-intensity activity. If you're doing vigorous-intensity activity, you will not be able to say more than a few words without pausing for a breath.

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. Even small bite-sized chunks of physical activity for five minutes spread throughout the day counts.

As well as moving more, it's important to limit the time spent being sedentary – this means not sitting or lying down more than necessary, when not sleeping. If you are sedentary, try to break up periods of inactivity with light physical activity.



## Muscle-strengthening activities

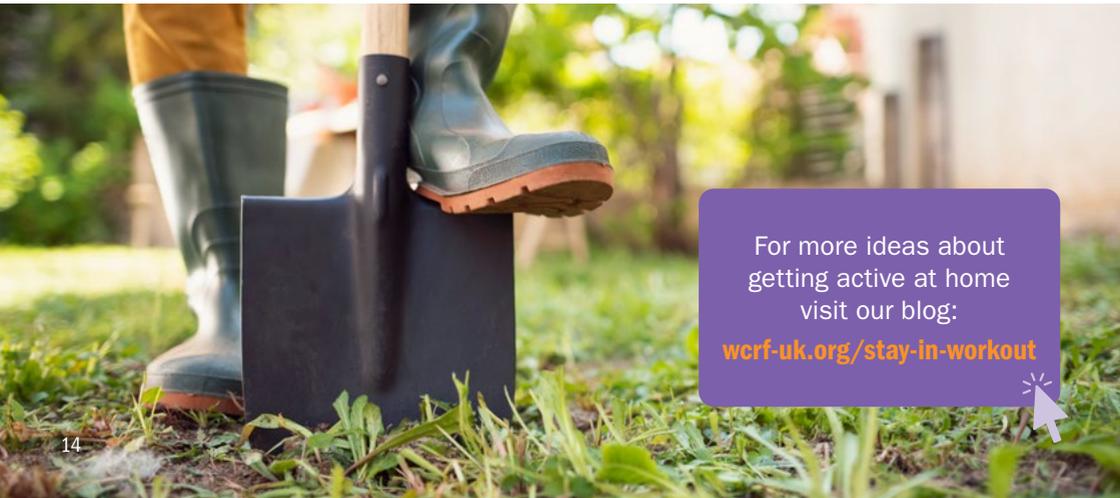
This is an area that is often overlooked. However, it is becoming more apparent the vital role this type of exercise has on our body. Muscle-strengthening activities help to maintain strength in adulthood and prevent the decline in muscle mass and bone density that occurs when we get older.

You may have experienced a loss of muscle during cancer and its treatment, but in rebuilding this lost muscle it will also help with balance, fatigue and quality of life. Plus, muscle-strengthening activities can help make daily activities feel easier.

Doing muscle-strengthening activities doesn't automatically mean having to go to a gym or lifting weights. They can be done at home without the need for weights. For example, you can use your bodyweight in exercises like squats, working with resistance bands or using items such as water bottles for added resistance. Heavy gardening like digging and carrying heavy shopping also counts.

### As a guide:

- ▶ Perform **2–3 sets** of the exercise of your choice for **10–15 repetitions** (the last repetition should make you work a bit harder).
- ▶ Lift and lower the weight in a controlled manner (**2 seconds up** and **3 seconds down**).
- ▶ You can make your exercise harder by doing each repetition **slower and/or increasing the number of repetitions** you do.
- ▶ Aim to do muscle-strengthening activities at least **twice a week**.



For more ideas about getting active at home visit our blog:

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





Yoga is another form of activity that counts as one of your recommended muscle-strengthening activities – and it can increase your physical and mental wellbeing. Not only does your body benefit from the movement, but your mind benefits from the stillness.

Aim to perform a range of exercises that work all of your major muscle groups, such as your legs, chest, back, shoulders, arms and abdominal (stomach) muscles. Incorporating these exercises into your daily routine doesn't need to take up much time – even spending 5–10 minutes doing a few exercises a couple of times a week is a positive start.



Another part of keeping active is flexibility. **Stretching for 5 minutes after strenuous activity** can help to reduce tightness in the muscles the following day.

## Being active in your daily life

While it may be harder for some to keep physically active, there are a number of ways to incorporate more physical activity into your daily life. **It's about making a few small changes**, for example, using the stairs instead of the lift or escalator, making journeys by foot instead of by car or bus – it's these changes that add up over time.



## Start small

Starting to get more physically active can be daunting to some, but it's about starting slowly, and gradually increasing how much you do.

If you find yourself getting fatigued quickly, **just do what you can**. Fit in 5–10 minutes here and there. Or go for 20–30 minutes in one go.

**It's about doing what best suits you and listening to how your body is feeling.**



## Partner up

If you'd like to start a new exercise or activity **try joining forces with others**. It's a great way to stay motivated, make new friends and can help give you that extra push.

Or how about signing up to an exercise or dance class? **Sometimes knowing you need to be somewhere at an agreed time can be all you need to stick with a fitness routine.**



## Get walking

Walking is one of the most popular forms of physical activity, it suits most abilities, and almost anyone can do it.

There are lots of ways you can increase the amount of walking you do, for example, **walking to the shops** (if you don't live too far away from your local shops); carrying your heavy shopping bags home counts as a muscle-strengthening activity too!



## Getting active at home

There are lots of things you can do to keep active at home. For example, if you are watching TV stand up at each advert break. If you have stairs, you could walk up and down the stairs or do some light stretching – it's about **breaking up every hour you are sitting down with some light movement**. If you can't walk or stand, try seated knee lifts, kicks, punches or arm circles.

**Don't let housework feel like a chore**. Put on some upbeat music and you have a free exercise class and a clean home!

**Gardening also counts towards your physical activity target**, provided it makes you feel warm and raises your heart rate. Plus, if you are doing digging or shovelling it counts as one of your recommended muscle-strengthening activities.

Why not **get off the bus a stop earlier or park further away**, or leave the car behind for short journeys? **Walking up the stairs** or escalator is another way to get more activity into your day – plus it helps to strengthen your leg muscles.

Explore your local surroundings – **walking is a great way to discover new places**, or maybe set up a local walking group or take part in one that has already been organised in your area.



## Getting active at work

While working, if you find yourself sitting at your desk for many hours, there's plenty you can do to be more active in your working day.

If you are on the phone, **try walking and talking**, or maybe you could have a standing meeting? Have a stroll through the office or **get up to speak to your work colleague** rather than emailing.

Whether you work in an office or at home **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.

When sitting at your desk or computer **try to get up and move every 30 minutes**.

Having a reminder on your phone can help prompt you to move.



## Do what you enjoy

If it's dancing along to your favourite song on the radio, doing an online fitness class, walking the dog (or maybe the neighbour's dog!), swimming, gardening, or yoga, the key is to **find something that you enjoy**, that way you will be more motivated to keep doing it.

**Find ways of being active that are fun and make you smile.**



## To stay safe and injury-free

Start with light to medium effort. Don't overexert yourself, and most importantly **listen to your body**. If you feel any twinges or overly out of breath stop what you are doing.

Aim to **warm-up and cool down** at an easy pace before and after exercise, **including doing some light stretching**.

**If you need it, get help from a qualified exercise professional** to make sure your exercises are appropriate to you and your individual abilities.



## Give yourself a reminder

If you are at home or work, **use your phone or computer to set a reminder to move more** – for example, maybe it's to go for a walk after lunch. The act of writing it down can help you stick to it.

Put your trainers and exercise clothes in clear sight, as this can be a gentle reminder to yourself to stick to that planned brisk walk.

**It's these little changes and reminders that help to keep us moving more.**



If you're new to exercise or haven't exercised in a while, it's a good idea to see your doctor for a check-up before getting started.



“

It's best to eat in a healthy way that suits you and your individual lifestyle, and importantly something that you can stick to for the long-term.

”

# Maintaining a healthy weight

There is growing evidence that being a healthy weight may help to reduce your risk of getting cancer again and improve your survival. Maintaining a healthy weight can also help lower your risk of heart disease, type 2 diabetes and other diseases.

You might find that you've gained some weight during cancer treatment. This could be for a number of reasons, for example, some cancer treatments like chemotherapy and hormone therapy can cause weight gain.

If you're having hormone therapy and you think this may be contributing to weight gain it is important to discuss this with your doctor or specialist nurse. **It's important not to stop taking any medication you have been prescribed.**

## Top tips to support healthy weight loss



- ▶ **Try to fit more physical activity into your day.** You can see how many calories your favourite exercise burns at: [wcrf-uk.org/exercise-calculator](http://wcrf-uk.org/exercise-calculator)
- ▶ **Eat more fibre rich food** like vegetables, fruit, pulses, unsalted nuts, seeds **and wholegrains** like oats and wholemeal bread.
- ▶ Eat more of a **'Mediterranean type'** diet which is rich in vegetables, fruit, pulses, nuts, wholegrains, fish and unsaturated fats, such as olive oil.
- ▶ **Use a smaller plate or bowl at mealtimes**, as this can help reduce the amount you eat. Alternatively, try filling most of your plate with salad or vegetables first.
- ▶ **Eat slowly and stop eating when you feel full.** It takes about 20 minutes for the stomach to tell the brain it's full.
- ▶ **Limit how often you have junk food and fast food.** To avoid temptation at home, don't stock up on junk food like chocolate, biscuits, crisps and sugar-sweetened drinks. If you do eat these types of food, try to restrict how often and how much you eat. Instead, opt for healthy snacks, such as fruit, vegetable sticks, unsweetened yoghurt, oatcakes, unsalted and unsweetened popcorn.
- ▶ **Read food labels** – this will help you choose food and drink which are lower in calories, fat, saturated fat, sugar and salt.

If you notice your weight has crept on after finishing your treatment it might be the ideal time to start thinking about your diet and lifestyle. Making healthy diet and lifestyle changes will benefit your health, and as a result, will help you manage your weight.

If you set yourself the goal of losing weight, try to eat healthily rather than being too restrictive and cutting out certain food groups.

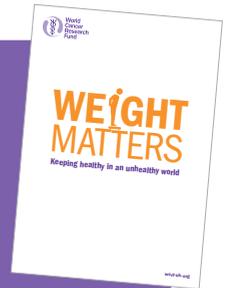
It's best to eat in a healthy way that suits you and your individual lifestyle, and importantly something that you can stick to for the long-term. Focusing on the quality of the food (the healthiness) rather than on the number of calories you are consuming can be an important first step.

If you need to lose weight it's important that you do so safely. Aim to gradually lose weight by making healthy changes to your diet and adding more physical 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 loss goal it's important to continue eating healthily and being active to help you maintain a healthy weight. If you choose to set a goal of losing a certain amount of weight, remember, any weight loss is better than none.

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**. You can download it for free at:

[wcrf-uk.org/weight-matters-keeping-healthy-unhealthy](http://wcrf-uk.org/weight-matters-keeping-healthy-unhealthy)



**Losing even a small amount of weight can be beneficial to your health.** Even if you don't need or want to lose weight, just stopping the pounds from creeping on is important for your long-term health.

For some people, they may have lost weight during their treatment. **The type of cancer you have had may also make weight loss more likely.** If you are underweight or don't have a big appetite, it's important to get your weight within a healthy weight range. **See page 31 for further information, tips and advice.**



If you are concerned about your weight or for specific advice on gaining weight you should speak to your doctor, dietitian or specialist nurse.

# How do I know if I am a healthy weight?



## Your BMI

Body Mass Index (BMI) is a simple way to check if you are a healthy weight for your height.

### To calculate your BMI:

1. Measure your height in metres.
2. Weigh yourself in kilograms.
3. Divide your weight by your height. Then divide your answer by your height again to work out your BMI.

Or use 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

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.

The use of 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), and those less than 1.5m/5ft tall.

## Your waist measurement

Not only is being a healthy weight for our height important for our health, where we store our fat on 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.

Measuring your waist is a good way of checking if your waist measurement is within the healthy range. While there is no special diet or exercise routine that will help you lose fat around your waist, it's the gradual loss of body weight through reducing your daily intake of calories and keeping physically active that will make a difference.



### To measure your waist:

- 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 isn't 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 South Asian men 90cm (35 inches).**



“ We eat far less red meat now and have also cut out as much sugar as possible. World Cancer Research Fund’s online advice about diet and exercise has been invaluable in giving us lots of tips and recipe ideas. ”



**Madeleine Dakin**  
Bowel cancer survivor  
and WCRF supporter

# Eating well

## Helping to stop cancer coming back

Many people want to know what they should eat after cancer. However, there isn't enough evidence to make specific recommendations about what people should eat to prevent a certain type of cancer coming back.

Nevertheless, it's best to eat a healthy, balanced diet, keep a healthy weight and get regular physical activity – not only for cancer prevention but to help reduce the risk of conditions like type 2 diabetes and heart disease. It's this combination of diet and lifestyle factors that is likely to have the biggest impact on your overall health.

## Getting back to normal

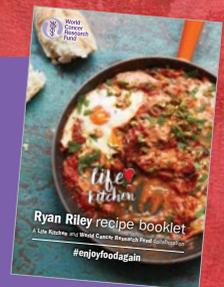
Many of the problems you may have had with eating during your cancer treatment should improve once you finish treatment. However, some effects last for longer. You may, for example, find that things no longer taste the same.



The types of problems and how long they last depend on the type of cancer and treatment you had. Speak to your doctor, dietitian or specialist nurse if you're having problems.



For those suffering from lasting taste changes, we have worked with chef **Ryan Riley** from the multi-award-winning **Life Kitchen** to develop recipes that focus on flavour. You can order your cookbook for **free** at: [wcrf-uk.org/ryan-riley](http://wcrf-uk.org/ryan-riley)





## Your diet after cancer

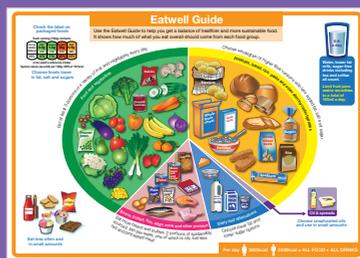
We know that eating too much high-calorie, high saturated fat, sugar and salt food contributes to weight gain. Making healthier changes and opting for lower-calorie (where appropriate), lower saturated fat, sugar and salt food, and eating more nutrient-rich food can make a big difference to your health.

Eating well after cancer doesn't mean having to cut out certain food or food groups (unless you have been advised by a dietitian). It's about eating a wide variety of food from all the different food groups to ensure your body gets all the nutrients it needs for good health.

## What does a healthy diet look like?

We should try to follow the government's **Eatwell Guide** on achieving a healthy, balanced diet. You can download it at:

[nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/the-eatwell-guide](https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/the-eatwell-guide)



This guide applies to most of us, whether we're a healthy weight or overweight, whether we eat meat or are a vegetarian, and no matter what our ethnic origin. It shows the different food groups and the proportion of food we should consume to have a healthy, balanced diet.

## In practice, a healthy diet is...

### Having a balance of different food groups in your diet, such as:

- ▶ **Wholegrain carbohydrates**, for example, wholemeal bread, brown rice, and wholewheat pasta.
- ▶ **Dairy and alternatives** (such as soya drinks).
- ▶ **Proteins** such as pulses (beans, peas and lentils), fish, eggs, lean meat, poultry and other proteins such as Quorn, tofu and soya.
- ▶ At least five portions from a variety of **vegetables and fruit**.
- ▶ Choose **unsaturated oils and spreads**, and eat in small amounts.
- ▶ **Drink at least 6–8 glasses of fluid a day** (about 2 litres). Water, lower-fat milk, sugar-free drinks, and unsweetened tea and coffee all count.
- ✔ **Try not to eat too much ‘fast food’ and other processed food** high in saturated fat, sugar and salt.
- ✔ **Eat a wide variety of food** (in the right quantities) to get all the nutrients you need for good health.

## Reshaping your plate

A first step in eating better is looking at what types of food make up your plate. For a healthy, balanced meal, at least three-quarters of your plate should be made up of wholegrains, vegetables, fruit and pulses. Basing your diet on these types of food is a great first step to eating well.

### What should make up most of your plate?

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

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





## Wholegrains, vegetables, fruit and pulses

- ▶ **Wholegrains** – brown rice, wholemeal pasta, wholemeal bread – these are also all high in fibre.
- ▶ **Pulses** – eg. lentils, peas and beans – all count towards your 5 A DAY (only counts as one portion a day no matter how much you have).
- ▶ **Vegetables** (excluding potatoes) **and fruit** – fresh, frozen, dried and canned in water or natural juices all count towards your 5 A DAY.

## Meat and other protein food

- ▶ **Red meat** – aim to eat no more than three portions a week (or about 350–500g of cooked meat), and little, if any, processed meat (this includes meats such as bacon, ham, chorizo and salami).
- ▶ **Pulses** – fresh, frozen and canned all count.
- ▶ **Poultry** – skinless chicken and turkey.
- ▶ **Non-oily fish** – like cod, pollock and tuna (fresh, frozen and canned all count).
- ▶ **Oily fish** – like salmon, trout, sardines and mackerel (fresh, frozen and canned all count).
- ▶ **Eggs, dairy and dairy alternatives** – choose reduced-fat, unsweetened varieties where possible.
- ▶ **Plant-based protein sources** – like soya, tofu, tempeh and Quorn.

## The importance of protein

Protein sources, whether from animal or plant, provide the muscles with the building blocks to **maintain muscle mass** and to help **maintain bone health**. Eat a variety of protein sources, and opt for more plant-based protein options like pulses, tofu, soya and Quorn.

# Practical ways to eat well

It is typically thought that eating healthily has to be expensive, but this is not the case. Check out the frozen food aisle of your local supermarket – frozen vegetables, fruit and pulses are often cheaper and are just as nutritious as fresh.

You can also save money by buying tinned food – lots of fruit (pears, peaches), vegetables (sweetcorn, peas), pulses (chickpeas, kidney beans) and fish (salmon, sardines) can be bought cheaper in tins. If you have a garden, growing your own vegetables and fruit is cheap, and adds physical activity into your day!

Preparing meals that you like and are easy to make is a good option. You may also want to consider batch cooking two or three meals at a time so you can freeze the extra portions.

Planning meals makes it easier to budget and think about how you're going to use leftovers. Why not get into a routine of planning a week of meals? You could try meat-free Mondays? It can also be helpful to make a shopping list and group it by meal – this will make you less likely to buy things you don't need and can have the added benefit of saving you money!

## Top tips for healthier cooking

- ▶ If you're using meat in a dish, you can **replace some of the meat** with added vegetables, pulses or grains such as barley.
- ▶ Use **spices** and other flavours instead of adding sugar or salt.
- ▶ Use **unsaturated fats** such as olive oil and rapeseed oil instead of butter, lard, coconut oil and ghee, which are all high in saturated fats.
- ▶ **Avoid adding salt when cooking** – if you do, try to gradually reduce the amount you add. Instead of salt, use herbs and spices to add flavour to your cooking.
- ▶ Use cooking methods such as **baking, sautéing, grilling** and **boiling** (using less water will help to preserve the vitamins and minerals), instead of frying.



## Cooking from scratch

Some people may find that they don't have the time or may find this overwhelming. But swapping even one meal, where you usually buy pre-made food can be an important first step to eating healthily. You can also save yourself some money in the process!

When starting to cook from scratch, you may find having some of the food listed below useful to have at home.

### Food for the cupboard:

- ▶ Tinned tomatoes
- ▶ Tinned soups (no added salt or sugar)
- ▶ Tinned tuna (in water)
- ▶ Herbs and spices
- ▶ Tinned pulses (beans, peas and lentils)
- ▶ Sunflower, rapeseed or olive oil
- ▶ Tinned fruit (in juice)
- ▶ Potatoes (regular or sweet potato)
- ▶ Wholewheat pasta and noodles
- ▶ Wholemeal bread
- ▶ Reduced-salt stock cubes
- ▶ Brown rice
- ▶ Dried pulses



### Food for the fridge:

- ▶ Onions
- ▶ Carrots
- ▶ Salad vegetables (like cucumber, tomatoes, lettuce and peppers)
- ▶ Eggs
- ▶ Low or reduced-fat milk and unsweetened yoghurt



### Food for the freezer:

- ▶ Frozen fruit and vegetables
- ▶ Frozen reduced-fat mince or soya mince
- ▶ Frozen pulses



# Calories

The best way to keep your calories in check is to choose lower-calorie food like vegetables, fruit, pulses and wholegrains. They also contain fibre which helps keep us fuller for longer.

High-calorie food, such as chocolate, crisps, biscuits, burgers and fried chicken tends to be high in saturated fat and/or sugar (and salt) and offer little in the way of vitamins, minerals and fibre. Regularly eating these foods can contribute to weight gain.

Some high-calorie food, such as oily fish, nuts, seeds, olive oil, rapeseed oil, and avocado contain good fats (unsaturated fats), and a number of essential nutrients, meaning they can be consumed in moderation as part of a healthy diet.



## Top tips to lower your calories



- ▶ **Watch your portion sizes** – try using a smaller plate as this can help you to eat less.
- ▶ **Choose white fish** such as pollock, skinless white chicken and turkey meat as lower-calorie options. To cut the calories in other meats, **choose the leanest cuts** and **trim as much visible fat** off before cooking.
- ▶ **Use lower-fat dairy food** such as semi-skimmed or skimmed milk, fat-free cottage cheese, light cream cheese and low-fat (unsweetened) yoghurts.
- ▶ **Boil, steam, grill, poach or microwave food rather than frying.** If roasting, use a small amount of an oil high in unsaturated fat (such as olive or rapeseed oil), or use a few sprays of a cooking spray. It's best to use olive oil for low and medium-heat cooking. If cooking at higher temperatures, use oils such as rapeseed, sunflower or avocado.

## If you have lost weight

The best way to slow down or stop weight loss is to make sure each mouthful you eat or drink gives you as many calories (energy) as possible. Of course, ensuring your diet is healthy and balanced is also important. **Choosing high protein food helps you maintain muscle mass.**



If you've tried to make changes but keep losing weight or cannot put any weight back on, ask your dietitian or doctor for support.

## Which food to choose?

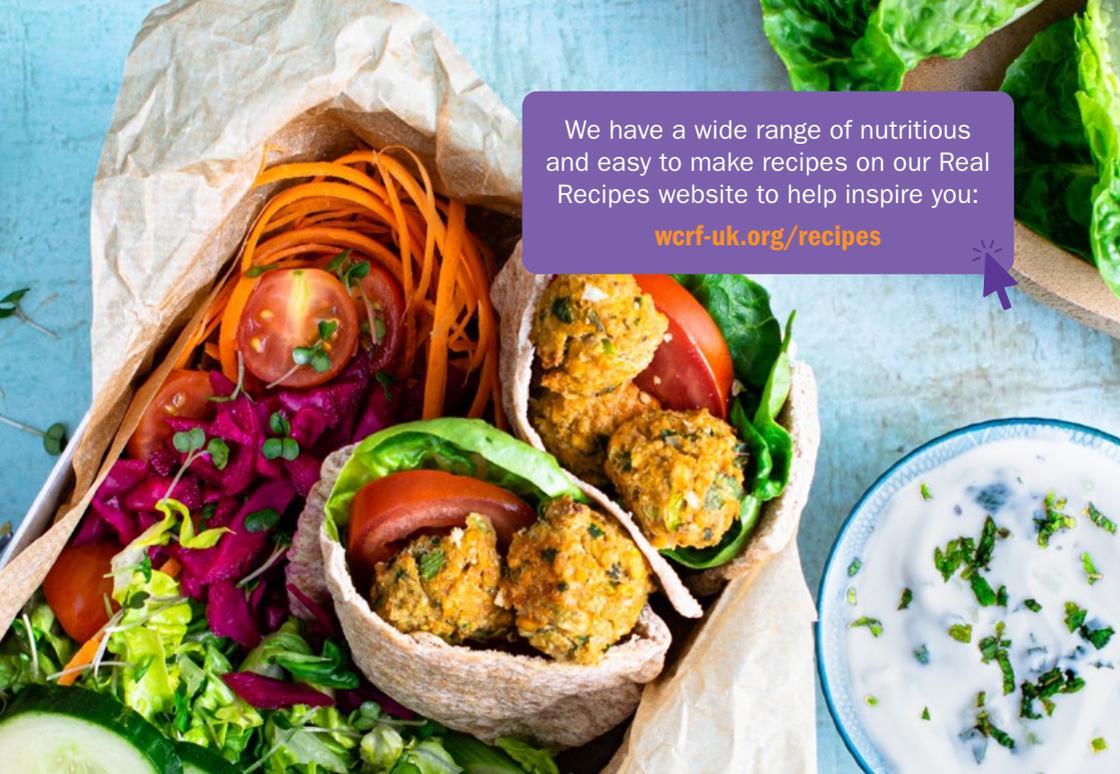
Food that are higher in fat have more calories per mouthful. However, it is still best to opt for food containing healthier fats, such as oily fish, unsalted nuts, seeds and avocados than junk food which contain unhealthy fats, such as saturated fats.

It is also best to avoid or limit food that is high in saturated fat, added sugar and salt, highly processed food such as biscuits and chocolate, fast food such as burgers, chips and fried chicken, and sugar-sweetened drinks such as cola.

### Top tips to increase your calories

- ▶ To **get as many calories as you can from every mouthful** try to avoid clear soups, eating lots of fruit and vegetables or having a large drink just before or during mealtimes. These can fill you up without giving you many calories.
- ▶ **Try to eat little and often** – you don't have to stick to three meals a day. You could have a snack or a small meal every two hours or so, including one before bed.
- ▶ Keep **high-calorie snacks and easy-to-prepare food to hand** at home and when you're out.
- ▶ **Add snacks such as unsalted nuts, seeds, full-fat Greek yoghurt with fruit, wholemeal toast with nut butter and sliced banana**, or why not try one of our delicious flapjack recipes [wcrf-uk.org/banana-and-peanut-butter-flapjacks](http://wcrf-uk.org/banana-and-peanut-butter-flapjacks)
- ▶ Instead of steaming or baking your food, you could increase the calories by **cooking with or adding healthier oils** such as olive or rapeseed.





We have a wide range of nutritious and easy to make recipes on our Real Recipes website to help inspire you:

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

## Reading front-of-pack food labels

Looking at front-of-pack food labels is the easiest way to see the amount of calories, fat, saturated fat, sugar and salt a portion of food or drink contains and whether it is a healthier choice.

If a food or drink has **mostly greens and no reds**, it's likely to be a healthier choice and you can eat it in larger amounts or more often. **Amber** means a food or drink is neither high or low in a nutrient, so you can have food or drink with all or mostly ambers quite often.

Most food or drink with **more than one red section** should only be eaten occasionally. There are some exceptions, such as oily fish, cheese and nuts, which contain healthy nutrients so can be included in small amounts as a part of a healthy, balanced diet.

For more information on understanding food labels, visit: [wcrf-uk.org/food-labels](http://wcrf-uk.org/food-labels)



# 5 A DAY your way

## Why 5 A DAY?

Vegetables and fruit contain many nutrients that are important for our health – they are a good source of fibre and contain a range of different vitamins and minerals.

They also contain many different phytonutrients (a natural chemical found in plants) which may be beneficial to our health.

As different types of vegetables and fruit contain a different mix of nutrients, try to eat a variety of different coloured vegetables and fruit every day.

## 5 A DAY – what counts?

**A portion of vegetables and fruit** weighs the equivalent of **80g** and **30g** for dried fruit.



**Vegetables** eg. carrots, spinach, broccoli, butternut squash, okra, pak choi and plantain (fresh, tinned or frozen count).



**Fruit** eg. bananas, apples and berries (fresh, tinned or frozen count).



**Pulses** eg. beans, peas and lentils (fresh, tinned or frozen count) – only count as one portion a day no matter how much you have.



**Unsweetened fruit juice, vegetable juice or a smoothie** – a portion is 150ml, only counts as one portion a day no matter how much you have.

## Practical tips for getting your 5 A DAY

- ▶ Add a chopped banana or berries to your cereal, or slices of pear or nectarine to low-fat natural yoghurt.
- ▶ **Instead of potatoes, try roasting sweet potatoes, squash or parsnips** in a little oil brushed or sprayed on. Unlike potatoes, they count towards your 5 A DAY.
- ▶ **Enjoy a fresh fruit smoothie.** Blend a portion of fruit (or vegetables), frozen or fresh, with some skimmed milk, soy or almond milk to make a tasty and nutritious drink.
- ▶ **Bulk up your meal with vegetables.** If you're cooking soups, sauces, chilli, curries or stews from scratch, try blending or adding in more vegetables. You could also add beans or lentils.
- ▶ Make vegetables and fruit that are past their best into a juice, smoothie or soup.
- ▶ **See what is in season.** It can be cheaper to buy vegetables and fruit in season.





## 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 of cooked meat:

- ▶ **Spaghetti Bolognese with minced beef = 140g** (about 210g raw meat)
- ▶ **Pork or lamb chop = 75g** (about 110g raw meat)
- ▶ **Roast beef, pork or lamb = 90g** (about 130g raw meat)

## What can you eat instead?

- ▶ **Oily fish**, like salmon, trout, sardines, pilchards and herrings, are rich in healthy omega-3 fats.
- ▶ **Non-oily fish**, like cod, **tuna** and **lean poultry**, such as skinless, white chicken and turkey meat, are great, low-calorie alternatives.
- ▶ **Eggs, reduced-fat dairy** and **meat-substitutes**, like pulses (such as beans), tofu and Quorn, are also good sources of protein so perfect alternatives to meat.

## Practical tips to cut down

- ▶ **Smaller portions** (about half the size of your hand) means you can have red meat more often and stick to less than 350g.
- ▶ **Substitute beef mince for turkey or Quorn mince.** Even if you do half and half, you will cut calories and saturated fat, and is just as filling. Boost the flavour with onion, garlic, herbs and spices.
- ▶ **Make red meat go further** by adding some beans, chickpeas or mushrooms to bulk up stews, chillies, and pasta sauces.
- ▶ **Use half the amount of mince** in a dish and replace it with tinned pulses – a great source of protein, and can save you money as well.
- ▶ Try to have more **meat-free days** if you can.



# Think about what you drink

Whether it's a glass of wine with a meal, or a gin and tonic at the end of the day, for many of us, drinking alcohol can become a normal part of day-to-day life.

While the immediate effects of drinking alcohol are obvious, it can have a longer-term impact on our health. There is strong scientific evidence that all alcoholic drinks can increase the risk of mouth and throat, oesophageal, breast, bowel, stomach and liver cancer.

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**. Alcohol can also be surprisingly high in calories. Not only this, but it is lacking in essential nutrients that your body needs.

## What is a unit?

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

**One bottle of lager/beer/cider** (330ml, 5% ABV) is **1.6 units**



**One 25ml measure of spirits** such as vodka or whisky is **1 unit**



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



To find out how many calories are in alcoholic drinks, visit: [wcrf-uk.org/alcohol-calculator](http://wcrf-uk.org/alcohol-calculator)

## How can I drink less alcohol?

- ▶ **Have a drink of water first** to reduce your thirst.
- ▶ **Finish your drink before topping up** your glass.
- ▶ **Alternate alcoholic drinks** with water or non-alcoholic drinks.
- ▶ **Avoid eating salty snacks** – they can make you thirsty and encourage you to drink more.
- ▶ **Dilute your drinks** – for example, opt for a small wine spritzer with soda water rather than a large glass of wine.
- ▶ Keep a few **alcohol-free days** each week.
- ▶ **Sip your drinks**. Try to avoid drinking too quickly.
- ▶ **Order small measures** – double measures may seem good value but can result in you drinking more.
- ▶ **Choose low-alcohol** or **alcohol-free** alternatives.



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



## Swap soft drinks

While we can often think about the calories we eat, it can be easy to forget about the calories we drink. Evidence has shown that sugary drinks – such as cola, lemonade, flavoured milks (with added sugar) and juices – can contribute to weight gain if consumed regularly or in large amounts. It's also easy to drink a lot as they don't fill you up as much as food.

While 100% fruit and vegetable juices (juices that contain no added sugar) and smoothies (with no added sugar) are a healthier option to soft drinks like full-sugar cola, they can still be high in sugar (and provide additional calories) and if you drink regularly, it increases the risk of tooth decay and weight gain. However, they can contain valuable nutrients like vitamin C, vitamin A, folate and potassium. The downside is that they don't have the fibre you would get from eating the fruit or vegetable in its natural state.

**Try to keep your intake of these type of drinks to a 150ml portion, which is the equivalent of a small glass. While they count as one of your 5 A DAY, they only count once no matter how much you have.**



### Top tips for healthier drinking:

- ▶ **Swap sugary drinks** for water or lower-calorie alternatives like sugar-free soft drinks, unsweetened tea and coffee, sparkling mineral water with a slice of lemon, lime or cucumber, or soda water and fresh mint.
- ▶ Instead of a large glass of fruit juice, **pour a small portion and dilute the juice** with sparkling mineral water.
- ▶ Rather than regular lattes, **opt for skinny versions of less milky coffees** like Americanos or cappuccinos (without chocolate) to cut the calories and sugar.
- ▶ **Try a herbal or fruit tea** – they come in a wide variety of flavours, and being naturally sugar-free, they make a healthier alternative to sugary drinks.



# Supplements – do you need them?

Dietary supplements are often taken by people who have survived cancer in the belief that they will provide a wide range of health benefits, including helping to reduce the risk of getting cancer again.

## Supplements and cancer prevention

Despite the promises made by some manufacturers, 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.

Scientific evidence about dietary supplements and cancer is, to date, limited. The results we do have are inconsistent. Some studies have shown that high-dose supplements can actually be harmful. As the effect of taking supplements is unclear, it is best not to use them, unless you have been advised otherwise by your doctor or a dietitian.

### 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. Supplements can be in a pill, capsule, powder or liquid form and sometimes in much higher doses than we would get naturally when eaten as part of our daily diet.



## Who may benefit?

While most people can get all the nutrients their body needs by eating a healthy, balanced diet, 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 five to take a daily ten microgram vitamin D supplement. People with darker skin and those not exposed to much sun, such as housebound people or those who choose to cover their skin are more susceptible to a vitamin D deficiency. Therefore, ensuring an adequate intake of vitamin D through diet or supplements is advised.
- ▶ 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.



If you think you may be deficient 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.

# Myth-busting

With the abundance of misinformation about diet and cancer in the media and online, more cancer survivors are turning to the internet for advice and information, where they are likely to encounter a wealth of information, not all of which will be reliable and accurate.

We give you the facts about some of the most popular diet and nutrition questions people ask about cancer.

## Does sugar feed cancer cells?

The cells in our body use sugar (glucose) for energy. Cancer cells grow faster than usual, which requires a lot of energy, leading to the suggestion that sugar ‘feeds’ cancer cells.



There is no strong evidence that cutting sugar out of your diet will prevent cancer or stop cancer cell growth or that eating more sugar will cause cancer cells to speed up their growth. However, sugary food and drink when consumed frequently or in large quantities can lead to weight gain. **Being overweight or obese is linked to an increased risk of at least 12 different types of cancer.**

## Do low-calorie sweeteners cause cancer?

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

In the EU, all low-calorie sweeteners undergo a rigorous safety assessment by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) before they can be used. They have concluded that sweeteners are safe for use in food and drink. The use of sweeteners can be useful to help people cut down on their sugar intake, and for those managing their weight, they provide little to no calories.



## Can dairy food increase the risk of cancer?

There is no strong evidence linking dairy products to any type of cancer. In fact, there is evidence to suggest that dairy products like milk and yoghurt may decrease the risk of colorectal cancer.



Dairy provides a number of essential nutrients such as calcium and vitamin B12. They are also a great source of protein. Try and opt for reduced-fat and unsweetened dairy products.

## Can following a vegan diet prevent cancer?

There is no conclusive scientific evidence that a vegan diet can prevent cancer. Nor does it appear that vegan diets are any more protective than plant-based diets that include moderate to small amounts of animal food.



Our Cancer Prevention Recommendations include eating more plant-based food such as wholegrains, vegetables, fruit, pulses, and eating less red and processed meat. Importantly, we should bear in mind that the exclusion of animal products does not necessarily mean a healthy diet. Poor choices can be made within any dietary pattern.

## Should I become vegetarian to lower my risk of cancer?

There is no evidence linking fish or lean poultry to an increased cancer risk, so we don't suggest cutting these out (or other animal products such as dairy and eggs) as they provide an important source of many essential nutrients.

Instead, we recommend a healthy, balanced diet that includes plenty of wholegrains, pulses, vegetables and fruit, and limiting red and processed meat consumption.



# Other advice you might find helpful

World Cancer Research Fund's main focus is to help 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](http://wcrf-uk.org) or call us on **020 7343 4205** for more information.

## Advice from other organisations

### General advice and support

#### ▶ Macmillan Cancer Support

Macmillan's Support Line is a free and confidential service, open Monday to Sunday from 8am to 8pm.

Call free on **0808 808 0000** or visit their website [macmillan.org.uk](http://macmillan.org.uk)

### General diet and lifestyle information

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



#### Disclaimer

The information in this guide should be safe to follow for most adults who have survived cancer. However, where the advice in this booklet differs from the advice given to you by your doctor, dietitian or specialist nurse, it is always best to follow their advice as it will be specific to your needs.

# 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.**

## About World Cancer Research Fund

World Cancer Research Fund (WCRF) 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 champion the latest and most authoritative global scientific research on cancer prevention and survival through diet, weight and physical activity.

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. We want a world where no one gets a preventable cancer.

We turn the latest evidence-based research into practical, straightforward advice and information to help anyone who wants to reduce their risk of developing cancer. 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)



### Contact us

If you have any comments or suggestions about any aspect of this booklet 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)

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