

# POLICY FACTSHEET

## Diet and cancer prevention

The World Cancer Research Fund's Cancer Prevention Recommendations advise everyone to eat a better diet as part of everyday life to lower cancer risk<sup>1</sup> and to support living well with and beyond cancer<sup>2</sup>.

This factsheet outlines how this recommendation can be rolled out at a population level. It expands advice in World Cancer Research Fund International's Policy Blueprint for cancer prevention, which combines evidence on cancer risk – our Cancer Prevention Recommendations – with policy advice for population-level prevention.

Globally, an estimated 2.8 billion people could not afford a healthy diet in 2023. This number had increased compared to 2019 and includes high-income countries.<sup>3</sup>

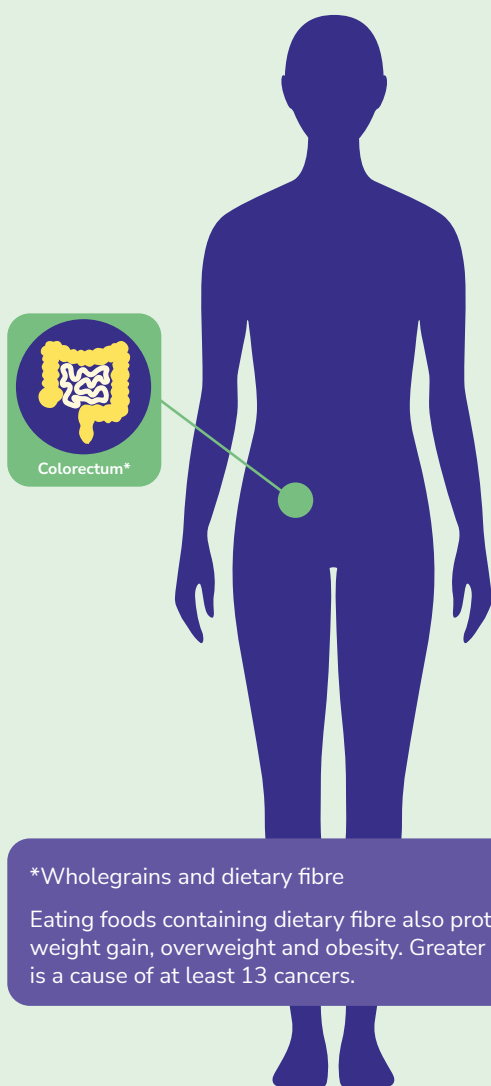


### CANCER PREVENTION RECOMMENDATION:

**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

For more details, see: [wcrf.org/evidence-for-our-recommendations/wholegrains-veg-fruit-beans](https://wcrf.org/evidence-for-our-recommendations/wholegrains-veg-fruit-beans)



Colorectum\*

\*Wholegrains and dietary fibre

Eating foods containing dietary fibre also protects against weight gain, overweight and obesity. Greater body fatness is a cause of at least 13 cancers.

Diet and cancer risk

There are 7 key policy areas to support healthy environments for better diets:



Marketing restrictions



Healthy urban and built environments



Fiscal and legal policies



Effectively inform people



Healthy and safe schools



Counselling in healthcare



Procurement, planning and incentives in communities

### Unlocking the co-benefits of cancer prevention policies

Our policy recommendations also have co-benefits in relation to prevention of non-communicable diseases (NCDs), meeting sustainability targets, reversing health inequities, addressing commercial determinants of health and fulfilling human rights. World Cancer Research Fund International's Policy Blueprint for cancer prevention includes an assessment of co-benefits and potential trade-offs when policy goals do not align.

[wcrf.org/blueprint-for-cancer-prevention](https://wcrf.org/blueprint-for-cancer-prevention)

## Marketing restrictions



- Mandatory advertising ban of foods high in fat, sugars and salt, sugary drinks and identifiable less healthy products, online and on TV.
- Restrictions on other types of marketing such as product placement, branding and multi-buy offers.

## Fiscal and legal policies



- Subsidies to improve accessibility of healthy foods.

## Healthy and safe schools and other settings



- Universal free or subsidised healthy school meals, including provisions for school holidays.
- High quality nutrition standards for meals in schools and early years education, appropriately monitored.
- Standards for food offered in other public bodies (eg, hospitals).

## Procurement, planning and incentives in communities



- Nutrition standards for public procurement that ensure compliance with healthy diets.
- Procurement through short supply chains to encourage local production of healthy foods.
- Initiatives to increase fibre and wholegrain content of food products in overall food supply.

## Healthy urban and built environments



- Policies that increase access to fruit and vegetables in local areas such as community gardens, and access and density of grocery stores (as opposed to fast-food outlets).

## Effectively inform people



- Robust front-of-pack food labelling that shows recommendations and judgements on the healthiness of a product and is based on a government-approved nutrient profile model.
- High quality nutrition education in school curricula.

## Counselling in healthcare



- Nutrition counselling in primary care.
- Nutrition training for health profession.

An integrated strategy which together addresses the influence of diet, weight, breastfeeding, physical activity and alcohol consumption will have a greater impact on cancer risk and survivorship than individual factors alone. For more information, visit [wcrf.org/blueprint-for-cancer-prevention](https://wcrf.org/blueprint-for-cancer-prevention)



## Strategies to support policies on healthy diets

- Make use of financial instruments such as subsidies to ensure availability and affordability of healthy foods – this is an under-utilised policy.
- Assess how social protection programmes enhance food security and ensure healthy diets.
- Incentivise local producers of healthy foods and develop disincentives (such as taxes) for producers of mainly unhealthy foods.
- Develop food-based dietary guidelines that prioritise recommendations based on local, culturally appropriate foods and include sustainability criteria.
- Use government purchasing power to ensure that procurement rules for public settings follow dietary guidelines and sustainability criteria.
- Follow international guidance, including the WHO NCD Best Buys<sup>4</sup>.

## Our other resources for policy-makers, professionals and the general public

### Resources for policy-makers

- NOURISHING nutrition policy database [policydatabase.wcrf.org](https://policydatabase.wcrf.org)
- NOURISHING nutrition policy index for Europe and country snapshots [wcrf.org/policy/nutrition-policy](https://wcrf.org/policy/nutrition-policy)



### Building Momentum reports:

- Lessons on implementing robust restrictions of food and non-alcoholic beverage marketing to children
- Lessons on implementing a robust front-of-pack food label
- Lessons on implementing a robust sugar-sweetened beverage tax [wcrf.org/policy/our-publications/building-momentum-series](https://wcrf.org/policy/our-publications/building-momentum-series)

### Resources for health professionals and the general public

- [wcrf.org/living-well](https://wcrf.org/living-well)
- [aicr.org/resources/media-library](https://aicr.org/resources/media-library)
- Resources in Dutch [wkof.nl](https://wkof.nl)

## References

1. Malcomson FC, Wiggins C, Parra-Soto S, et al. Adherence to the 2018 World Cancer Research Fund/American Institute for Cancer Research Cancer Prevention Recommendations and cancer risk: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Cancer*. 2023;129(17):2655-2670.
2. Shams-White MM, Brockton NT, Mitrou P, Kahle LL, Reedy J. The 2018 World Cancer Research Fund/American Institute for Cancer Research (WCRF/AICR) Score and All-Cause, Cancer, and Cardiovascular Disease Mortality Risk: A Longitudinal Analysis in the NIH-AARP Diet and Health Study. *Curr Dev Nutr*. 2022;6(6):nzac096.
3. FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2023: Urbanization, agrifood systems transformation and healthy diets across the rural-urban continuum. Rome: FAO.; 2023.
4. World Health Organization. Tackling NCDs: best buys and other recommended interventions for the prevention and control of noncommunicable diseases. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2024.

## About us

World Cancer Research Fund International is a leading authority on the links between diet, nutrition, weight and physical activity and cancer. We are an international not-for-profit association that leads and unifies a network of cancer prevention charities, including the American Institute for Cancer Research, World Cancer Research Fund in the UK and Wereld Kanker Onderzoek Fonds in the Netherlands. World Cancer Research Fund International is in official relations with the World Health Organization.

## Acknowledgements

For a full list of acknowledgements please scan the QR code.



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