

POLICY FACTSHEET

Physical activity and cancer prevention

World Cancer Research Fund's Cancer Prevention Recommendations advise everyone to be physically active as part of everyday life to lower cancer risk¹ and to support living well with and beyond cancer².

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.



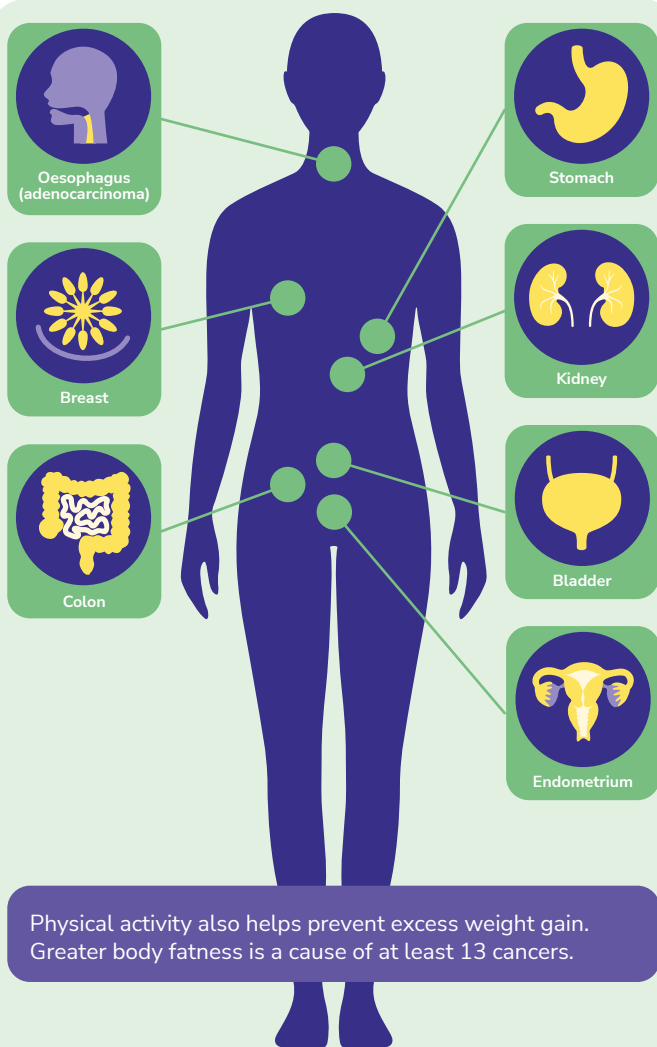
CANCER PREVENTION RECOMMENDATION:

Be physically active

- Be physically active as part of everyday life – walk more and sit less
- Be at least moderately physically active and follow or exceed national guidelines
- Limit sedentary habits

For more details, see: wcrf.org/evidence-for-our-recommendations/be-physically-active

Globally, more than 80% of adolescents and 27% of adults do not meet World Health Organization - recommended levels of physical activity of at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic physical activity per week.³



Physical activity and cancer risk

There are 6 key policy areas to support healthy environments for increased physical activity and reduced sedentary behaviour:



Healthy and
safe schools



Active and
public transport



Healthy urban and
built environments



Effectively
inform people



Procurement,
planning and
incentives in
communities



Counselling
in healthcare

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

Healthy and safe schools and other settings



- Initiatives that optimise opportunities for physical activity (including walking and cycling to and from school), active play before and after school, during recess and lunch breaks, and to reduce sitting during class lessons.
- Policies to encourage behaviour change and provide opportunities and infrastructure for physical activity in workplaces and the community, and for sports and recreation.
- Labour and workplace policies that support physical activity.

Healthy urban and built environments



- Active design guidelines for urban planners and architects that ensure buildings and public spaces promote physical activity.
- Incentivisation for integrated, health promoting urban design.
- Walking and cycling infrastructure.
- Policies that ensure adequate access to, and use of, natural environments for physical activity, recreation and play.

Procurement, planning and incentives in communities



- Community walking and cycling programmes.
- Sport and recreation policies that create active opportunities equitably.

Active and public transport



- Transport policies, systems and infrastructure that prioritise walking, cycling and use of public transport.
- Road safety actions for pedestrians and cyclists.
- Parking and public transport policies that encourage active transport.
- Tax incentives to encourage workplaces to implement active travel policies for staff.
- Congestion charges and fuel levies.

Effectively inform people



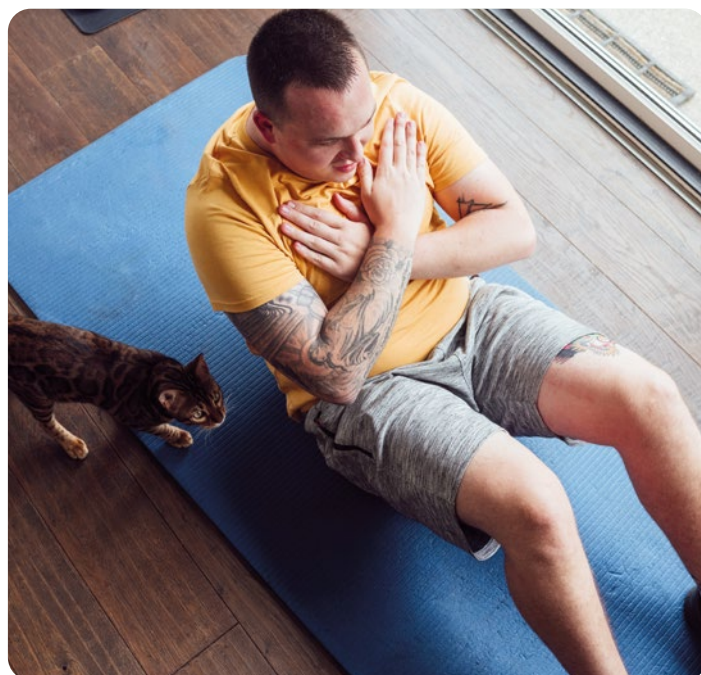
- High quality physical education in school curricula.
- Enhanced physical activity training for all teachers.
- Tools and educational strategies that target built environment professionals (architects, urban planners) to embed active-living principles into their practice.
- Strong knowledge and awareness in key professional sectors (eg, health professionals) of their role and impact on influencing and enabling participation in physical activity.

Counselling in healthcare



- Simplified guidelines and protocols for integrating physical activity assessment and promotion in healthcare settings, including screening for physical activity in all health checks.
- Physical activity counselling and referral as part of routine primary health care services.

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



Strategies to support our policy recommendations on physical activity

- Develop and implement a national physical activity action plan to support an increase in health-promoting physical activity at population level.
- Develop targeted actions for specific populations such as physical activity guidelines for infants and children, adolescents, adults and older people, and policies targeted at vulnerable or marginalised groups.
- Focus on infrastructure policies that create environments which enable people to be less sedentary and make it easy to be physically active.
- Follow international guidance, including the WHO NCD Best Buys⁴, and the WHO Global action plan on physical activity (GAPPA)⁵.



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

Resources for policy-makers

- MOVING physical activity policy database policydatabase.wcrf.org
- MOVING physical activity policy index for Europe and country snapshots wcrf.org/policy/nutrition-policy



Building Momentum reports:

- Establishing robust policies to promote physical activity in primary healthcare wcrf.org/policy/our-publications/building-momentum-series/establishing-robust-policies-to-promote-physical-activity-in-primary-healthcare



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. World Health Organization. Global status report on physical activity 2022. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2022.
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.
5. World Health Organization. Global action plan on physical activity 2018-2030: more active people for a healthier world. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2019.

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.

Resources for health professionals and the general public

- wcrf.org/living-well
- aicr.org/resources/media-library
- Resources in Dutch wkof.nl

Acknowledgements

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



World Cancer Research Fund International,
Upper Ground Floor, 140 Pentonville Road,
London N1 9FW

Email policy@wcrf.org

wcrf.org

f facebook.com/WoCRF

X X.com/wcrfint

in linkedin.com/company/wcrf

bsky bsky.app/profile/wcrf.org



Scan the QR code to find more
information on our policy resources
and **our policy work**

