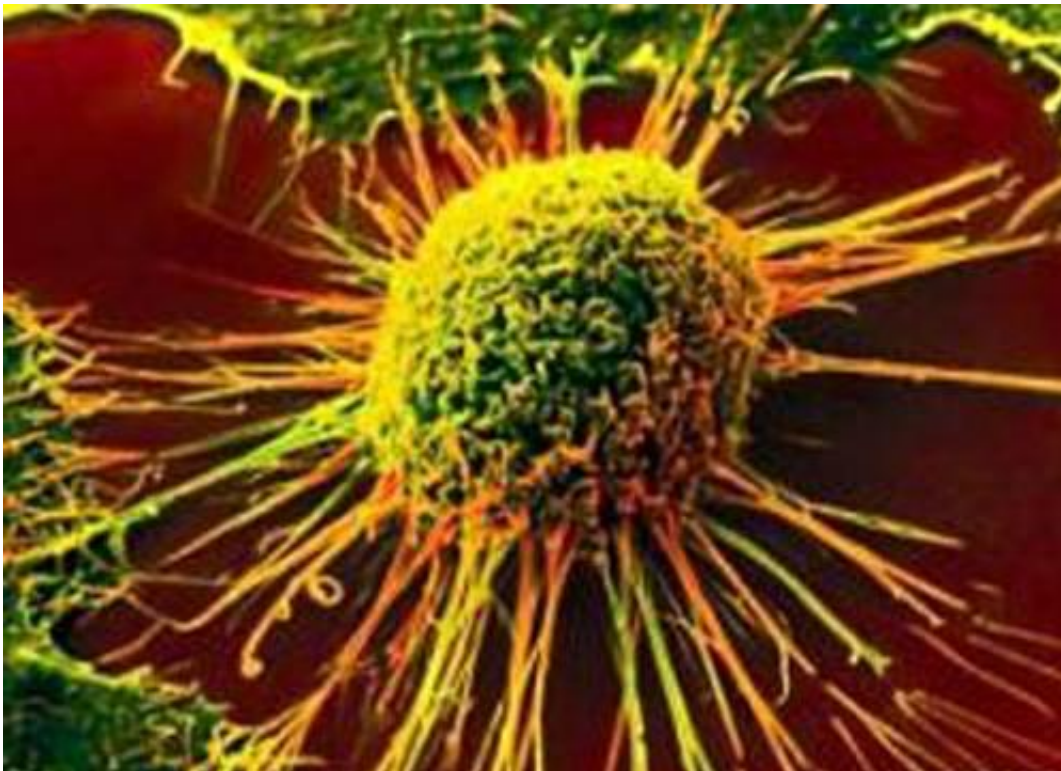


Lifestyle modifications that that may reduce risk of cancer

January 20 2015, by Michele Munz, St. Louis Post-Dispatch



Cancer can be seen as striking haphazardly, but research over the past 40 years shows that lifestyle factors play a huge role in cancer incidence and mortality. Dr. Graham Colditz, an internationally recognized disease-prevention expert at Siteman Cancer Center at Barnes-Jewish Hospital, has put together a list of behaviors that greatly reduce overall cancer

risk. And they're not as complicated as you might think. For a healthy 2015, Colditz suggests starting with one or two from the list. Once you've got those down, move on to the others.

1. Maintain a "healthy weight"

It's easier said than done, but a few simple tips can help. If you're overweight, focus first on not gaining any more weight. That can give your health a boost. When you're ready, try to take off some extra pounds. Tips:

- Integrate physical activity and movement into your life.
- Eat a diet rich in fruits, vegetables and whole grains.
- Choose smaller portions and eat more slowly.

For parents and grandparents:

- Limit children's TV and computer time.
- Encourage healthy snacking on fruits and vegetables.
- Encourage activity during free time.

2. Get [screening tests](#)

A number of important screening tests can help protect against cancer. Some tests find cancers early when they are most treatable, while others can actually help keep cancer from developing in the first place. For [colorectal cancer](#) alone, regular screening could save more than 30,000 lives each year. Talk to a health care professional about which tests you should have and when.

Cancers that should be tested for regularly:

- Colon and rectal cancer
- Breast cancer
- Cervical cancer
- Lung cancer (in current or past heavy smokers)

3. Protect yourself from the sun

While the warm sun feels great, too much exposure can lead to skin cancer, including serious melanoma. Skin damage starts early in childhood, so it's especially important to protect children. Tips:

- Steer clear of direct sunlight between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. (peak burning hours). It's the best way to protect yourself.
- Wear a hat, long-sleeved shirt and sunscreen with SPF15 or higher.
- Don't use sun lamps or tanning booths. Try self-tanning creams instead.

For parents and grandparents:

- Buy colored sunscreen so you can see if you've missed any spots on a fidgety child.
- Set a good example for children by protecting yourself with clothing, shade and sunscreen.

4. Exercise regularly

While it can be hard to find the time, it's important to fit in at least 30 minutes of activity every day. More is even better, but any amount is better than none. Tips:

- Choose activities you enjoy. Many things count as exercise, including walking, gardening and dancing.
- Make exercise a habit by setting aside the same time for it each day. Try going to the gym at lunchtime or taking a walk after dinner.
- Stay motivated by exercising with someone.

For parents and grandparents:

- Play active games with your kids, and go on family walks and bike rides.
- Encourage children to play outside and take part in organized activities, such as soccer, gymnastics and dancing.
- Walk with your kids to school in the morning.

5. Don't smoke

Quitting smoking is absolutely the best thing you can do for your health. Yes, it's hard, but it's also far from impossible. More than 1,000 Americans stop for good every day. Tips:

- Keep trying. It often takes six or seven tries before you quit for good.
- Talk to a health-care provider for help.
- Join a quit-smoking program. Your workplace or health plan may offer

one.

For parents and grandparents:

- If you smoke, your children will be more likely to smoke, so try to quit as soon as possible.
- Don't smoke in the house or car. If kids breathe in your smoke, they may have a higher risk of breathing problems and [lung cancer](#).
- Talk to your kids about the dangers of smoking and chewing tobacco. A health-care professional or school counselor can help.

6. Eat a Healthy Diet

Despite mounds of information that can be confusing, the basics of healthy eating are quite straightforward. Focus on fruits, vegetables and whole grains, and keep red meat to a minimum. Cut back on bad fats (saturated and trans fats) and choose healthy fats (polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats). Taking a multivitamin with folate every day is a great insurance. Tips:

- Make [fruits and vegetables](#) a part of every meal. Put fruit on your cereal. Eat vegetables as a snack.
- Choose chicken, fish or beans instead of red meat.
- Choose whole-grain cereal, brown rice and whole-wheat bread.
- Choose dishes made with olive or canola oil, which are high in healthy fats.
- Cut back on fast food and packaged snacks (like cookies), which are

high in bad fats.

7. Drink alcohol only in moderation, if at all

Moderate drinking is good for the heart, but it can also increase the risk of [cancer](#). If you don't drink, don't feel the need to start. If you drink moderately (less than one drink a day for women, less than two drinks a day for men), there's probably no reason to stop. People who drink more, though, should cut back. Tips:

- Choose nonalcoholic beverages at meals and parties.
- Avoid occasions centered around alcohol.
- Talk to a health-care professional if you feel you have a problem with alcohol.

For parents and grandparents:

- Avoid making alcohol an essential part of family gatherings.
- Discuss the dangers of drug and alcohol abuse with children when appropriate. A health-care professional or school counselor can help.

8. Protect yourself from sexually transmitted infections

Among other problems, sexually transmitted infections - like human papillomavirus (HPV) - are linked to a number of different cancers. Protect yourself from these infections. Tips:

- Besides not having sex, the best protection is to be in a monogamous relationship with someone who does not have a sexually transmitted infection.

- For all other situations, always use a condom and follow other safe-sex practices.
- Never rely on your partner to have a condom. Always be prepared.

For parents and grandparents:

- When appropriate, discuss with children the importance of abstinence and safe sex. A health-care professional or school counselor can help.
- Vaccinate girls and young women as well as boys and young men against HPV. Talk to a health professional for more information.

©2015 St. Louis Post-Dispatch

Distributed by Tribune Content Agency, LLC

Citation: Lifestyle modifications that that may reduce risk of cancer (2015, January 20) retrieved 2 June 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2015-01-lifestyle-modifications-cancer.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.