

Adhering to global health recommendations reduces cancer risk

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People who adhere to global Cancer Prevention Recommendations are putting themselves at lower risk of developing the disease, new research confirms.

Experts at Newcastle University have reviewed evidence of following the 2018 World Cancer Research Fund (WCRF) and American Institute for Cancer Research (AICR) lifestyle-based recommendations.

The findings, published today in *Cancer*, revealed that adhering to a healthier lifestyle, including maintaining a [healthy body weight](#) and eating little red meat and processed meats such as bacon, helps to stave off several forms of the disease.

Further evidence

Approximately 40% of all cancers are linked with modifiable lifestyle factors—such as physical inactivity, [tobacco use](#), living with obesity, a [poor diet](#), and alcohol intake, suggesting many cases are preventable.

Scientists found that each 1-point increment in a score used to assess adherence to these Cancer Prevention Recommendations resulted in a 12% lower risk of bowel [cancer](#), 11% reduction in risk of breast cancer, and 8% lower chance of lung cancer.

Dr. Fiona Malcomson, Lecturer in Human Nutrition at Newcastle University's Human Nutrition and Exercise Research Centre, is a co-author of the study.

She said, "This is the first study to review the evidence to date on the impact of following the latest version of the World Cancer Research Fund and American Institute for Cancer Research Cancer Prevention Recommendations and the risk of developing cancer."

"Our findings are exciting as they provide further evidence of some of the best ways to reduce the risk of cancer, in particular breast, bowel, and lung cancers."

"By following these recommendations, people may reduce their risk of certain cancers, and we would recommend that people adhere to them as closely as possible."

"The evidence for the effects of lifestyle factors is stronger for certain cancers. For example, eating a lot of red and processed meat increases the risk of bowel cancer, and drinking alcohol can raise your risk of cancers such as breast, bowel, and oesophageal."

However, there are other non-modifiable factors, such as a family history of cancer, and environmental exposures that can also affect people's risk of developing the disease.

Scientists carried out a [systematic review](#) and meta-analysis of 18 published studies which investigated associations between adhering to the 2018 recommendations and the incidence of different cancers.

The WCRF/AICR Cancer Prevention Recommendations are the conclusions of an independent panel of experts—they represent a package of healthy lifestyle choices which, together, can impact on people's likelihood of developing cancer.

The recommendations are:

- be a healthy weight
- be physically active
- eat a diet rich in wholegrains, vegetables, fruits, and beans
- limit "fast foods" and other processed foods high in fat, starches, or sugars
- limit consumption of red meat and processed meat
- limit consumption of sugary sweetened drinks
- limit alcohol consumption
- do not use supplements for cancer prevention

- for mothers, breastfeed your baby, if you can
- after a cancer diagnosis: follow the WCRF/AICR Recommendations, if you can

'Deepens understanding'

Dr. Panagiota Mitrou, Director of Research, Policy and Innovation at World Cancer Research Fund, said, "This study deepens our understanding of the impact our Recommendations have on reducing cancer risk."

"The more evidence we have demonstrating how following our Recommendations as a pattern of behaviors can reduce cancer risk, such as having a [healthy diet](#), keeping active and maintaining a healthy weight, the more we can support positive change."

This research was carried out as part of the Cancer Lifestyle Prevention Recommendations (CALIPER) UK Study. Further research is needed to confirm these findings in relation to additional cancer sites.

The CALIPER UK Study, a collaboration between Newcastle University and Glasgow University, is using data from the UK Biobank to investigate whether greater adherence to the Recommendations changes the risk of developing cancer at 14 sites in a UK population.

More information: Adherence to the 2018 World Cancer Research Fund (WCRF)/ American Institute for Cancer Research (AICR) Cancer Prevention Recommendations and cancer risk: a systematic review and meta-analysis, *Cancer* (2023). [DOI: 10.1002/cncr.34842](https://doi.org/10.1002/cncr.34842)

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