



8 Steps to Lower Cancer Risk

The association of lifestyle and cancer risk is worthy of our attention. Comprehensive studies by the American Institute of Cancer Research and the World Cancer Research Fund estimated that healthy diets, together with regular physical activity and appropriate body mass, could potentially reduce cancer incidence by 30 to 40 per cent. At current rates, on a global basis, this represents three to four million cases of cancer per year that could be prevented by a healthy diet and an active lifestyle.

I recommend a simple 8-step path to a lower cancer risk that can be easily adopted by everyone.

1. Body weight

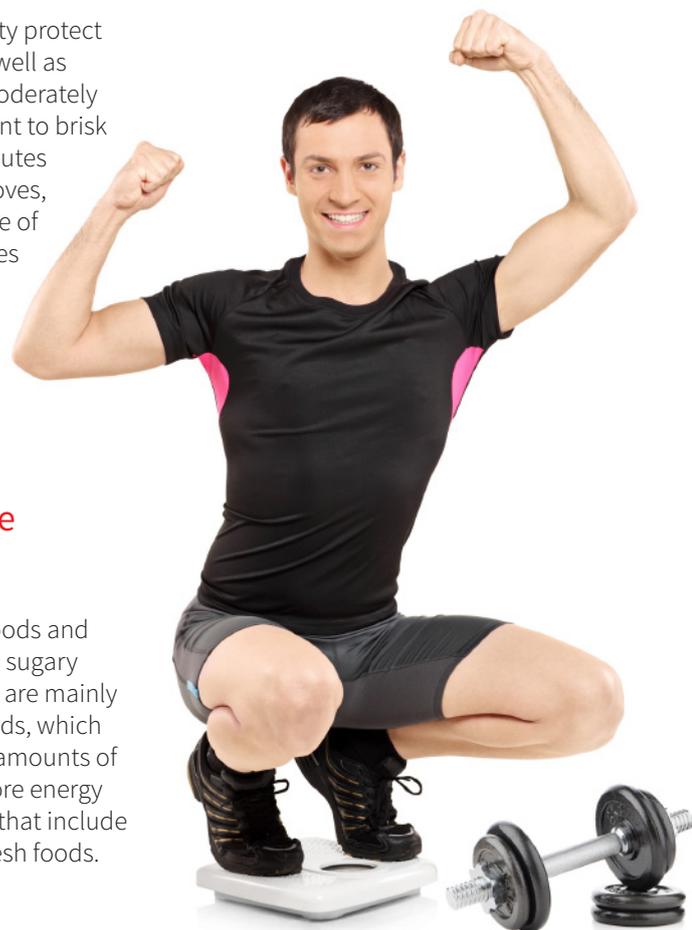
Keep your body-mass-index (BMI) between 18 to 23. Many cancers, including colon, breast, endometrium (the lining of the uterus), kidney, esophagus, gallbladder, ovaries, and pancreas, are associated with obesity. Maintenance of a healthy weight throughout life may be one of the most important ways to protect against cancer.

2. Physical activity

All forms of physical activity protect against some cancers, as well as against weight gain. Be moderately physically active, equivalent to brisk walking for at least 30 minutes every day. As fitness improves, aim for 60 minutes or more of moderate, or for 30 minutes or more of vigorous, physical activity every day. Limit sedentary habits such as watching television.

3. Food that promote weight gain

Consume energy-dense foods and 'fast food' sparingly. Avoid sugary drinks. Food supplies that are mainly made up of processed foods, which often contain substantial amounts of fat or sugar, tend to be more energy dense than food supplies that include substantial amounts of fresh foods.



4. Eat mostly foods of plant origin

Evidence shows that most diets that are protective against cancer are mainly made up from foods of plant origin. Eat at least five portions/ servings (at least 400 g) of a variety of non-starchy vegetables and of fruits every day. Limit refined starchy foods. Non-starchy vegetables include green, leafy vegetables, broccoli, eggplant, and cabbage, but not, for instance, potato, yam or sweet potato. Non-starchy roots and tubers include carrots and turnips.

5. Limit intake of red meat and avoid processed meat.

Consume less than 500 g a week of red meat, very little, if any, to be processed. Meat can be a valuable source of nutrients, in particular protein, iron, zinc, and vitamin B12. Many foods of animal origin are nourishing and healthy if consumed in modest amounts.

6. Limit alcoholic drinks

The evidence on cancer justifies a recommendation not to drink alcoholic drinks. Other evidence, however, shows that modest amounts of alcoholic drinks are likely to reduce the risk of coronary heart disease. If alcoholic drinks are consumed, limit consumption to no more than two drinks a day for men and one drink a day for women. The evidence shows that all alcoholic drinks have the same effect. There is no significant difference on the type of drink and therefore all alcoholic drinks, whether beers, wines, spirits (liquors), or other alcoholic drinks are implicated. The important factor is the amount of alcohol consumed.

7. Limit consumption of salt

Evidence on methods of food preservation, processing, and preparation shows that salt and salt preserved foods are probably a cause of stomach cancer.

8. Dietary supplements are not recommended for cancer prevention

Evidence shows that high-dose nutrient supplements can be protective or can cause cancer. Consumption of supplements for cancer prevention might have unexpected adverse effects.

Increasing the consumption of the relevant nutrients through the usual diet is preferred.



This article is written by Dr Wong Seng Weng. Dr Wong is currently the Medical Director and Consultant Medical Oncologist of The Cancer Centre (Singapore Medical Group) at the Paragon and Mount Elizabeth Novena Specialists' Centres.

Dr Wong obtained his basic medical degree from the National University of Singapore (NUS) under the Lim Boon Keng and Tan Siak Kew Scholarships and graduated on the Dean's List for outstanding academic achievement. He completed his post-graduate training in Internal Medicine and obtained his Membership of the Royal College of Physicians of the United Kingdom (MRCP UK). Thereafter, he achieved Specialist Accreditation with the Ministry of Health Singapore and was admitted as Fellow of the Academy of Medicine of Singapore (FAMS) and College of Physicians of Singapore. Dr Wong continued his practice in the National University Hospital and was appointed clinical tutor of the clinical faculty of the National University of Singapore. Apart from pursuing his clinical practice, Dr Wong was keenly involved as an investigator in over twenty clinical trials exploring novel methods of cancer treatment. He previously held the posts of Consultant Medical Oncologist and Senior Partner of the Raffles Cancer Centre in charge of all oncology services at the Raffles Hospital. He was also appointed as Chairman of the Singapore Medical Group Medical Board.

Apart from his practice at The Cancer Centre, Dr Wong is currently also a visiting consultant of the National University Hospital where he is a tutor

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Dr Wong is an active member of the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) as well as the European Society for Medical Oncology (ESMO) and Singapore Society of Oncology. He lectured widely at international cancer conferences in Vietnam, China, India, Bangladesh, Malaysia and Indonesia.

Dr Wong specializes in the diagnosis and treatment of adult cancers with special interest in breast cancers, lung cancers and gastrointestinal cancers.

