Cancer is Americans’ number one health worry. Surveys also show many of us believe we can do nothing to protect ourselves.

In fact, scientific evidence shows that we can protect ourselves from cancer. We know that how we eat and drink, how active we are each day and how much we weigh — and whether we use tobacco — all make a difference.

There are, however, many factors that researchers are still investigating. That’s why it’s helpful to separate what we know from what we don’t know when deciding how to live for lower cancer risk. This brochure is a common-sense guide.
What We Know:

AICR/WCRF’s Continuous Update Project, the world’s largest ongoing analysis of diet and cancer research, shows that *approximately one-third of the most common cancers could be prevented* if everyone:

- ate a healthful diet,
- was physically active every day and
- maintained a healthy weight.

Many additional cancer cases could be prevented by avoiding tobacco.

That means we are in control of many of the most important risk factors.
AICR’s Guidelines for Cancer Prevention

Advise:

Choose mostly plant foods, limit red meat and avoid processed meat.

Eat an abundant variety of vegetables, fruits, whole grains and beans. Plant foods contain vitamins, minerals, fiber, antioxidants and phytochemicals (naturally occurring substances) that block the beginning and growth of cancer.

Limit red meat consumption to no more than 18 ounces, cooked, per week and avoid processed meats (such as hot dogs, bologna, sausage, bacon and ham). AICR’s Continuous Update Project found strong evidence that eating too much red meat and processed meat raises your risk of colorectal cancer.

It’s also important to limit alcoholic beverage consumption. Alcohol has been convincingly linked to cancers of the mouth, throat, esophagus, larynx and liver. If you drink alcohol at all, consume no more than one standard-size drink per day for women and two drinks for men.
Be physically active every day in any way for 30 minutes or more.
Strong scientific evidence shows that physical activity protects against colon cancer and probably breast and endometrial cancers. Because physical activity burns calories, it also reduces risk of cancers caused by overweight and obesity. AICR recommends at least 30 minutes per day of moderate physical activity, as well as moving often during the day to avoid being sedentary.

Aim to be a healthy weight throughout life.
Obesity and overweight are cancer risks all by themselves. They have been linked to postmenopausal breast cancer, colon cancer and cancers of the endometrium, esophagus, gallbladder, kidney and pancreas.

Aim to prevent weight gain by controlling your portion sizes, eating foods that are lower in calories and getting regular physical activity.

And always remember — do not smoke or chew tobacco.
Smoking is the single most common cause of cancer, according to the National Cancer Institute.
Other Known Cancer Risks

Occupational Factors
Some workers are regularly exposed to known carcinogens such as arsenic, asbestos, benzene, beryllium, cadmium, chromium, lead, nickel, uranium and vinyl chloride.


Viruses
Several viruses are implicated in certain cancers: Epstein-Barr virus (in esophageal cancer), *Helicobacter pylori* virus (ulcers and stomach cancer), hepatitis B and C viruses (in liver cancer), Human papillomavirus (HPV) in cervical cancer and the human T-cell virus (in leukemia). Practicing safe sex and being vaccinated for hepatitis B will largely protect you from these viruses. For women, regular Pap tests are a safe method to detect precancerous lesions caused by HPV before cervical cancer develops.
Some Medical Treatments

Radiation therapy. Cancer patients undergoing radiation therapy may have increased risk for cancer and should discuss this with their oncologist.

Medications. Drugs that suppress the immune system, including chemotherapies for cancer and hormone replacement therapy, may increase risk of some cancers. Check with your health-care provider or oncologist.

Radiation

Ultraviolet (UV) rays from the sun or tanning beds. Although 10-15 minutes of sun exposure is safe and even helpful for vitamin D production, it’s important to take precautions: wear sunscreen and a hat before going outside for longer periods in sunny weather (even in winter).

• For more information, visit the National Cancer Institute: [www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/types/skin](http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/types/skin), 1-800-4-CANCER (1-800-422-6237).

Radon (a naturally occurring gas emitted from the earth and found in the lower levels of some homes and in water). Radon is considered an important cause of lung cancer, although radon is more prevalent in some areas of the United States than others.

• For more information, visit the Environmental Protection Agency: [www.epa.gov/iaq/radon](http://www.epa.gov/iaq/radon) or call 1-800-SOS-RADON (1-800-767-7236).
Genetics

No more than 5-10 percent of cancer cases are related to inherited genetic mutations. Although an inherited gene flaw increases a person’s cancer risk, it does not guarantee that person will develop cancer. Diet, physical activity and weight are much stronger influences overall.

If you have a close relative (mother, father, sister or brother) who has had cancer or if you carry a cancer gene, it’s important to conduct routine self-examinations and get periodic screenings on a schedule recommended by your health-care provider.

- For more information about screenings for specific cancers, contact the National Cancer Institute, [www.cancer.gov](http://www.cancer.gov), 1-800-4-CANCER (1-800-422-6237).

Medical X-rays are also a minor risk factor for cancer. Usually, the benefits of X-ray diagnoses outweigh the cancer risk. Talk to your health-care provider.
Areas of Ongoing Investigation

Many people are concerned about the possible links between cancer risk and pesticides, food additives, chemicals (including bisphenol A, or “BPA”) present in certain plastics and household products, hormones in beef and milk, genetically modified foods and cell phone use.

The evidence that these factors contribute to human cancer risk is less consistent than the clear and convincing research on diet, physical activity and weight.

We cannot yet rule out the possibility that the following factors play a role in human cancer — but there is an important difference between a possibility and a fact. Until we know more, you may wish to adopt precautions.

Pesticide Residues and Additives in Foods

The U.S. government regulates the use of pesticides and food additives. Eating foods that contain pesticides could increase cancer risk slightly. On the other hand, we know that diets high in fruits and vegetables lower cancer risk overall. The bottom line is: eat plenty of vegetables, fruits, whole grains and beans — fresh, frozen or canned.

- For more information about pesticides, visit the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency at http://www.epa.gov/pesticides.
Electromagnetic Fields

Cell phone use involves exposure to non-ionizing radiation and is being studied as a possible factor in brain cancer development. Electromagnetic fields from computer use and proximity to power stations are also under investigation.

- For more information about cell phones and cancer risk, contact the Environmental Working Group, http://www.ewg.org.

Air, Land and Water Pollution

At high doses, some pesticides and other environmental pollutants have been shown to cause cancer in laboratory animals and humans. By comparison, lower concentrations in the general environment are currently believed to contribute to a small percentage of cancer cases; research is still ongoing.

- For more information about other potential environmental cancer risk factors, contact the Environmental Working Group, www.ewg.org, 202-667-6982.
Remember: You’re in Control of Most Cancer Risks

When you encounter sensational stories about cancer “causes” in newspapers, magazines, TV and radio shows and the Internet, use your common sense. Make sure the information is science-based and the source is reliable. Remember that the results of one study can never provide enough evidence to prove a cause for cancer. Results of many studies, however, do show that at least one-third of the most common cancers can be prevented by factors you control:

- eating a healthy diet,
- getting at least 30 minutes of daily physical activity and
- maintaining a healthy body weight.

And always remember — do not smoke or chew tobacco.

For healthy meal planning, recipes and tips, visit www.aicr.org.
You can support AICR’s life-saving research and education efforts in a variety of ways:

- Make a donation online at www.aicr.org;
- Write to AICR, 1759 R Street, NW, P.O. Box 97167, Washington, DC 20090-7167; or
- Include a bequest in your will.

For more information, contact our Gift Planning Department at 1-800-843-8114.
About AICR

The American Institute for Cancer Research (AICR) is the cancer charity that fosters cancer prevention and survivorship through healthy diets, physical activity and body weight. About one-third of the most common cancers could be prevented this way. By raising awareness of this message, we hope that many thousands of lives will be saved. The education and research programs of AICR are funded almost entirely by donations from the public.

We fund cutting edge cancer research and help people make choices that reduce their chances of developing cancer. We are part of a global network of charities that are committed to preventing cancer.