

REDUCING YOUR CANCER RISK IN THE NEW YEAR

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As the weather outside gets colder and January 1st creeps closer, New Year's resolutions start to be made. 2020 has been a memorable year that has highlighted the importance of good health, which many of us have taken for granted in the past. As 2021 rolls in, it's time for a fresh start – whether you want to keep up good habits or change bad behaviours, here are some goals you can set to reduce your cancer risk.

THE BASICS

Cut the smoking

Tobacco smoking is the single greatest modifiable risk factor for cancer. In 2015, it caused an estimated 72% of lung cancers and played a role in ~18% of all new cancers in Canada. Quitting or cutting down on tobacco smoking is the most meaningful way to reduce your risk of cancer.

Get moving

Physical activity is protective against a multitude of cancers, including esophageal, lung, liver, colorectal, breast, and endometrial cancer. A lack of physical activity was implicated in close to 5% of new cancers in Canada in 2015.

Switch up your diet

Adding whole grains and fibre to your diet can decrease your risk of colorectal cancer, and also protects against weight gain, overweight, and obesity (all of which represent another risk of cancer). Eating more fruits and non-starchy vegetables may decrease your risk of esophageal, lung, and bladder cancers.

Practice sun safety

Skin cancer is the most common cancer in Canada and is one of the most preventable cancers. Check the UV index every day, even in the winter, and slather on the SPF 30.

THE UNCONVENTIONAL

Implement Meatless Mondays

Consuming red meat and processed meat increases your risk of nasopharyngeal, esophageal, lung, stomach, pancreatic, and colorectal cancer. Try substituting red and processed meats once a week with a vegetarian alternative like legumes or tofu, or even swapping red meat for a white meat like chicken or turkey.

Make a toast with a mocktail

Alcohol consumption is associated with an increased risk of multiple cancers, including cancer of the mouth, pharynx, larynx, oesophagus, lung, stomach, pancreas, liver, colorectum, breast, and skin. The Canadian Cancer Society recommends drinking a maximum of one alcoholic beverage per day for women and two for men.

THE ESSENTIALS

Ask about getting vaccinated

Chronic infection with hepatitis B or hepatitis C and infection with several strains of human papillomavirus (HPV) are classified as carcinogens by the International Agency for Research on Cancer. Hepatitis B and HPV infections are preventable through vaccines: talk to your healthcare provider to see if these vaccines are right for you.

Know your family history

Certain cancers, like breast and colorectal, are strongly related to family history, and between 5% and 10% of cancers are due to inherited gene mutations. Your doctor can go over your family's history of cancer and can help you decide if you should undergo genetic tests or more rigorous cancer screening.

