

Cut your cancer risk

Most Australians will enjoy a long and healthy life. However, some people's cancer risk is affected by things that they do.

You may be able to avoid many cancers by changing the way you live.

Resolve to reduce your risk

It makes good sense to choose a healthy lifestyle. Not only will it help reduce your risk of cancer, you'll also have more energy and feel better about yourself. You will also cut your risk of heart disease, diabetes and obesity.

To reduce your risk of cancer:

- Don't smoke.
- Avoid second-hand tobacco smoke.
- Be sunsmart.
- Be active.
- Stay a healthy weight.
- Avoid or limit alcohol.
- Eat a healthy diet.

For starters...stop

About one in five deaths from cancer are due to smoking. More than eleven thousand Australians are diagnosed with a smoking-related cancer each year.

Smoking causes cancer in the lung, larynx, oropharynx, kidney, oesophagus, bladder, mouth, lip, tongue, nasal sinus, cervix, ureter, bone marrow (myeloid leukaemia), pancreas and stomach.

The good news is that it's never too late to stop. The younger you are, and the sooner you stop, the better. Even smokers who quit at the age of 60 can cut their chance of getting cancer and other diseases.

The best health choice you can make is to quit smoking. Better still, never start.

You'll need to plan to quit, and you may need help

- If you feel tempted to smoke, think carefully about why you would start and the effects on your health. Focus on the benefits of not smoking: for your health – and your finances!
- If you smoke, make a real attempt to quit. Enlist your family and friends' support. Call the Quitline on 13 7848 and ask for a free Quit pack to be mailed to you. Or a trained Quitline adviser can help you with practical and expert advice.

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- You can also log on to the Quit website, www.quit.org.au for helpful advice and information on quitting. You will find the Quit Coach, an Internet coach that can advise you how to quit, based on your own situation. You will also find Will Power, a fun electronic character who lives on your desktop. Will Power will help you plan to quit and give you helpful tips and advice.

Avoid second-hand tobacco smoke

Even if you don't smoke, breathing in other people's cigarette smoke can increase your risk of cancer. Make sure that you and your family are smokefree.

Plan to:

- Be a smokefree role model for others.
- Tell people if their smoke bothers you.
- Demand that your workplace be smokefree (if it's not already).
- Make your home and car smokefree.
- Choose venues that are smokefree.
- Visit www.smokefree.org.au.

Treat your skin like a baby's

Most cancers diagnosed in Australia each year are skin cancers. Every year, more than twelve hundred Australians die from skin cancer. Yet it is almost totally preventable.

Skin can burn in as little as 15 minutes in the sun. The longer your unprotected skin is in the sun, the greater your risk of getting skin cancer.

It is not safe to get a tan at a solarium either – you're being exposed to damaging ultraviolet rays that increase your risk of skin cancer.

Plan to:

- Use shade when you can, especially when UV radiation is high – between 10 am and 3 pm.
- Wear hats that shade your face and neck, loose-fitting protective clothing and sunglasses. Wraparound glasses are best.
- Cover exposed parts of your body with a broad spectrum SPF 30+ sunscreen, 20 minutes before going out in the sun.
- Apply sunscreen liberally and reapply every two hours.

- Go to the doctor if you have a lesion that doesn't heal, a mole that has suddenly appeared or started to bleed, or one that has changed its size, thickness, shape or colour.
- Log on to the SunSmart website www.sunsmart.com.au for more information.

Get out and see the world!

Keeping fit and active has many health benefits. Being active, most days of the week, appears to cut the chance of breast cancer (after menopause), bowel cancer and possibly prostate cancer. It also helps prevent heart disease and stroke, and strengthens muscles and bones.

At least 30 minutes of moderate exercise (like brisk walking, cycling, mowing the lawn or swimming), on most days of the week, is recommended for good health. Some evidence suggests that 60 minutes a day, including some vigorous exercise (like football, netball or jogging) is more likely to reduce the risk of cancer.

Plan to:

- See exercise as an opportunity, not an inconvenience.
- Be active every day, in as many ways as you can: walk instead of driving to the shops, and walk in your lunchbreaks.
- Walk or cycle to work, and walk up stairs instead of taking the lift or escalator.
- Do something you enjoy or can do with a friend, like tennis, swimming, salsa, or line dancing.
- Build up your exercise slowly, whichever activity you choose.
- Talk to your doctor before starting, if you haven't exercised for a while.

Stay on top of your weight

Staying the right weight for your height doesn't come easily for many people. Yet evidence shows that obesity increases the risk of breast cancer (after menopause), and endometrial, colon, oesophageal and kidney cancers. So it's well worth trying to stay in shape.

If you are overweight, you are eating more than you need for your height and level of activity. Exercising more and eating a balanced diet are two of the best ways to stay within a healthy weight range and reduce the risk of cancer.

Is your weight healthy?

Body mass index (BMI) is a way of measuring whether you are within a healthy weight range, by dividing body weight (in kilograms) by height (in metres squared).

Example

Bob is 1.74 m tall and weighs 82 kg

To calculate his BMI:

$82 \div 1.74 \div 1.74 = 27 \text{ kg/m}^2$
(Weight \div height \div height = BMI)

The desirable range is from 18.5 to 25 kg/m².

- A BMI less than 18.5 kg/m² means you are underweight.
- A BMI more than 25 kg/m² means you are overweight.
- A BMI more than 30 kg/m² means you are obese.

The average BMI for Australian women is 26 kg/m² and for men 27 kg/m², which means the average Australian is overweight.

Overweight and obesity among Australian children is also on the rise.

Plan to:

- Reduce your weight by 5–10% if you are overweight or obese, and make it your priority not to gain more weight.
- Cut back on foods and drinks high in fats and sugars. Fast foods and pre-prepared meals from the supermarket are nearly always high in fat.
- Choose non-fat or reduced fat milk and dairy products and select soft cheeses (ricotta or cottage).
- Snack on vegetables and fruit.
- Set a good example for children by making healthy food choices and being active.

Think about how much you drink

Drinking alcohol increases the risk of cancers of the mouth, pharynx, larynx, oesophagus and liver and possibly breast cancer.

To reduce the risk of cancer, alcohol should be avoided. If you choose to drink, limit your intake.

For men, the recommended limit is no more than two standard drinks a day.

For women, it's one standard drink per day.

A standard drink equals:

- 285 ml of beer (one glass of beer)
- 100 ml of wine (one glass of wine)
- 30 ml of spirits (one measure of spirits).

If you choose to drink, plan to:

- Eat some food when you drink alcohol.
- See a glass of wine or beer as something to enhance a meal rather than a means of getting drunk.
- Alternate alcoholic drinks with non-alcoholic ones like mineral or soda water.
- Dilute alcoholic drinks, for example, try a shandy (beer and lemonade), white wine and mineral water, spirits and low-calorie soft drinks.
- Choose low-alcohol beer and wine drinks.
- Avoid binge drinking.

For better living, boost your diet with more vegetables and fruit

Eating lots of processed meats and red meat has been linked to bowel cancer. Processed meats like ham, bacon, sausages, salami and frankfurts should be limited. Red meat is an important source of nutrients in the Australian diet, but it should be limited to three or four serves a week.

Eating plenty of vegetables and fruits is important to your overall health and may help protect against some cancers, especially cancers of the digestive tract. Try to eat at least five servings of vegetables and two servings of fruit a day. A serving size is about a handful.

Choose wholegrain cereal products (such as wholemeal bread and brown rice) where possible, instead of processed foods like white bread and white rice. They're good for your overall health, and will help you stay the right body weight.

Plan to:

- Choose fish, poultry or vegetarian options instead of red meat for some meals.
- Use meats to flavour your dishes, rather than being the focus of your meal.
- Teach your children healthy eating. Young children seem to like vegetables plain rather than mixed together, and often prefer raw vegetables.

Keep an eye on yourself

Finding cancer early offers one of the best chances to cure the disease. See your doctor straight away if you notice any unusual changes. Look for:

- lumps, sores or ulcers that don't heal
- unusual changes in your breasts – lumps, lumpiness, a thickened area, unusual nipple discharge, a nipple that turns inwards (if it hasn't always been that way), a change in shape or colour or unusual pain
- coughs that don't go away or show blood, a hoarseness that hangs around
- a loss in weight that can't be explained
- for women, any loss of blood, even if it is a few spots between your periods or after they have stopped
- moles that have changed shape, size, or colour, or bleed
- blood in a bowel motion
- persistent changes in toilet habits.

Many problems that are less serious and more common than cancer often have the same symptoms.

Take part in screening

Because screening for breast, bowel and cervical cancer saves lives, these regular checks are one of the best health habits to get into. Prostate cancer is complex.

Check for early breast cancer

If you're a woman aged 50–69, check for breast cancer by having a screening mammogram (breast x-ray) every two years. To make an appointment for this free test call BreastScreen on 13 20 50.

Ask about screening for bowel cancer

Men and women over 50 should have a faecal occult blood test (FOBT) every two years to check for bowel cancer. You can do the test in your own home. Ask your doctor about having a test.

Have regular Pap tests for cervical cancer

Women aged between 18 and 70 should have a Pap test every two years, even if you are no longer having sex. This is the best way to reduce your risk of cervical cancer.

What about prostate cancer?

At the moment most health authorities, including The Cancer Council Victoria, do not recommend that all men should be tested for prostate cancer. This is because there is no reliable evidence at this stage that this prevents men from dying from prostate cancer. However, research may answer this question in time.

We do not suggest that no men should be tested. Instead, men should discuss this issue with their doctor and then make an informed decision on their own behalf.

Visit the prostate cancer website at www.prostatehealth.org.au or

For more information contact the Cancer Council Helpline on 13 11 20 (cost of a local call). This is a confidential service staffed by cancer nurses. Information is available in languages other than English.