



# Cancer

*fact sheet*

Cancer  
AnswerLine™

## BE PROACTIVE: TIPS FOR A CANCER PREVENTION LIFESTYLE

To help reduce your risk of cancer, it is important to eliminate or reduce contact with things known to cause cancer. It is estimated that two-thirds of all cancer cases are linked to environmental causes, and many of these are linked to lifestyle factors that can be modified. This may be done by changing conditions that contribute to cancer (such as obesity or lack of exercise) or by using medicines that interfere with cancer development. Sometimes lifestyle changes are a key part of prevention. For instance, quitting tobacco greatly reduces a person's chance of getting lung and other cancers.

### TEN TIPS FOR A HEALTHY LIFESTYLE

#### **TIP ONE: Don't smoke - if you do, quit**

Tobacco use accounts for at least 30% of all cancer deaths. Learn more about the effects of tobacco at [mcancer.org/breaking-habits-beating-us/tobacco-how-quit](https://mcancer.org/breaking-habits-beating-us/tobacco-how-quit). For help with quitting smoking, contact the MHealthy Tobacco Consultation Service at 734-998-6222 or email [MHealthy-Tobacco@med.umich.edu](mailto:MHealthy-Tobacco@med.umich.edu).

#### **TIP TWO: Control your weight**

Getting to and staying at a healthy weight is important to reduce the risk of cancer and other chronic diseases, such as heart disease and diabetes. Being overweight or obese increases the risk of several cancers, including those of the breast (in women past menopause), colon and rectum, endometrium (the lining of the uterus), esophagus, pancreas, and kidney, among others. To reduce your cancer risk, keep your Body Mass Index (BMI) below 25. Check your BMI using the **American Cancer Society's BMI Calculator**: [cancer.org/healthy/toolsandcalculators/calculators/app/body-mass-calculator](https://cancer.org/healthy/toolsandcalculators/calculators/app/body-mass-calculator). MHealthy offers programs and resources to help with managing weight. Visit [mhealthy.umich.edu/weight](https://mhealthy.umich.edu/weight).

#### **TIP THREE: Eat healthy foods**

Eating well is an important part of improving your health and reducing your cancer risk.

- Choose foods and drinks in amounts that help you get to and maintain a healthy weight.
- Limit how much processed meat and red meat you eat.
- Eat at least 2½ cups of vegetables and fruits each day.
- Choose whole grains instead of refined grain products.

MHealthy offers program and resources to improve eating habits. Visit [mhealthy.umich.edu/nutrition](https://mhealthy.umich.edu/nutrition).

#### **TIP FOUR: If you drink alcohol, limit how much**

People who drink alcohol should limit their intake to no more than 2 drinks per day for men and 1 drink per day for women. The recommended limit is lower for women because of their smaller body size and slower breakdown of alcohol. Contact the MHealthy Alcohol Management Program for help with drinking less alcohol or none at all. Call 734-998-2017 or email [mhealthyalcoholmgmt@med.umich.edu](mailto:mhealthyalcoholmgmt@med.umich.edu).

#### **TIP FIVE: Be more active**

The other key to controlling your weight is being more physically active. Being active helps reduce your cancer risk by helping with weight control. It can also help improve your hormone levels and the way your immune system works. The latest recommendations for adults call for at least 150 minutes of moderate intensity or 75 minutes of vigorous intensity activity each week, or an equivalent combination, preferably spread throughout the week. MHealthy offers program and resources to help with becoming more active. Visit [mhealthy.umich.edu/fitness](https://mhealthy.umich.edu/fitness).



## TIP SIX: Limit sun exposure

People who get a lot of exposure to ultraviolet (UV) rays are at greater risk for skin cancer. Sunlight is the main source of UV rays, but you don't have to avoid the sun completely. Here are some ways you can limit your exposure to UV rays:

- **Use sunscreen** - broad spectrum protection (against both UVA and UVB rays) and with sun protection factor (SPF 30) or higher are recommended.
- **Protect your skin with clothing** - long sleeved shirts, long pants, wide brimmed hats and sunglasses can cover your skin. If possible, buy clothing that is labeled with UV protection factor (UPF).
- **Avoid tanning beds and sun lamps** - tanning lamps give out UVA and UVB rays and have been linked to increased risk of melanoma.
- **Seek shade** - avoid being in direct sunlight too long and between the hours of 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. when UV light is strongest.

## TIP SEVEN: Avoid Carcinogens

Many people worry that substances or exposures in their environment may cause cancer. Substances and exposures that can lead to cancer are called carcinogens. Some carcinogens do not affect DNA directly, but lead to cancer in other ways. For example, they may cause cells to divide at a faster than normal rate, which could increase the chances that DNA changes will occur. Carcinogens do not cause cancer in every case, all the time. Examples of carcinogens are Asbestos, outdoor air pollution, some chemicals in pesticides.

## TIP EIGHT: Know your family history

Genetic testing is the process of using medical tests to look for changes (mutations) in a person's genes or chromosomes. Genetic testing can be used in different situations. The type of testing most often used to check for cancer risk is called predictive gene testing. It's used to look for gene mutations that might put a person at risk of getting a disease. It's usually done in families with a history that suggests there's a disease that may be inherited. An example is testing for changes in the BRCA1 and BRCA2 genes (known breast cancer genes) in a woman whose mother and sister had breast cancer. To learn more about cancer genetics and if testing is right for you, visit: [mccancer.org/cancer-genetics](http://mccancer.org/cancer-genetics)

## TIP NINE: Avoid contact with the human papilloma virus (HPV)

Since HPV is the main cause of cervical cancer and pre-cancer, avoiding exposure to HPV could help you prevent this disease. HPV is also associated with increasing the risk of throat, anus, vulva and vaginal cancer. HPV is passed from one person to another during skin-to-skin contact with an infected area of the body. Also, HPV infection seems to be able to be spread from one part of the body to another.

Ways to reduce contact with HPV are limiting sexual partners, wearing condoms and getting vaccinated. Vaccines are available to help prevent infection by certain types of HPV and some of the cancers linked to those types: Gardasil®, Gardasil 9®, and Cervarix®. All of these vaccines help prevent infection by HPV-16 and HPV-18.

## TIP TEN: Have a regular health exam

Regular health exams and tests can help find problems before they start. They also can help find problems early, when your chances for treatment and cure are better.

- Review your family health history
- Find out if you are due for any general screenings or vaccinations
- Write down a list of issues and questions to take with you

If you have further questions about learning how to live a cancer preventative lifestyle, feel free to call an experienced oncology nurse at the Cancer AnswerLine™ at 800-865-1125 or contact via email at [canceranswerline@med.umich.edu](mailto:canceranswerline@med.umich.edu).