

Eating Guidelines for Cancer Prevention

Plant-Based Diet

Eating well is one thing you can do to help lower your chance of getting cancer. Eating a mainly plant based diet, one that includes vegetables, fruits, whole grains and legumes (beans and lentils), seeds and nuts is recommended to help lower cancer risk. Many plant foods are naturally low in calories and eating them can help you maintain a healthy body weight, which may be one of the most important ways to lower cancer risk. Eating fruits and vegetables probably protects against cancer of the mouth, throat, esophagus, stomach, colon as well as lung and prostate. Foods high in fibre may also lower your chance of getting cancer of the colon and rectum. Vegetables, fruits, whole grains and legumes have fibre and phytochemicals, and vitamins and minerals that help keep your body and immune system strong. Phytochemicals are substances found in plant-based foods that may lower your chance of being diagnosed with cancer.



Steps you can take

Eat a wide variety of different plant foods every day. Fill your plate with at least 2/3 plant foods. Make vegetables, fruits, whole grains, lentils, dried beans and peas the focus of your meal. Think of meat as a garnish rather than the centerpiece.

Eat at least 5 servings of non-starchy vegetables and/or fruits every day.

- This is easier than you think. Start your day with a serving of fruit and make sure to have two servings of vegetables or fruit at both lunch and dinner. Examples of a serving are:
 - 125 mL (½ cup) of fresh or frozen vegetables or fruit like cauliflower or blueberries
 - 250 mL (1 cup) of leafy greens like spinach or romaine salad
 - 1 medium piece of fresh fruit

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- 60 mL (¼ cup) of dried fruits like apricots.
- Include a range of different colours (red, green, yellow, white, purple, and orange) of vegetables and fruits every day. Choose brightly coloured fruit and vegetables like romaine lettuce, spinach, oranges, tomatoes, watermelon, berries, red or yellow peppers, butternut squash, beets and carrots. Regularly eat cruciferous vegetables like bok choy, broccoli, cauliflower and cabbage; and allium vegetables like onions and garlic.

Eat whole grains and/or legumes (beans and lentils) with every meal.

- Check the ingredient list when buying breads, cereals and crackers to determine if a food is made with whole grains. The first ingredient listed should be whole wheat, whole oats, whole rye, whole grain corn, brown rice, wild rice, barley, bulgur, oats or sprouted grains. Enriched wheat flour and unbleached flour are not whole grains, and are low in fibre. Bran, seeds and wheat germ are good additional ingredients.
- Limit foods made from white flour (enriched wheat flour and unbleached flour) such as white bread, pasta, and pizza, cakes, pastries, and cookies, and refined (white) rice.

Tips to help you eat more whole grains

- Choose whole grains such as wild rice or brown rice, barley, oats and quinoa.
- Choose whole wheat or whole rye varieties of bread, pita, buns, flatbreads and crackers.
- Choose whole wheat pasta or couscous or other whole grain pastas like spelt.
- Look for cereals made with whole grains or bran such as oatmeal, All-Bran® or oat bran. Good choices are cereals with at least 4-6 grams of fibre in each serving. If your favourite cereal is low in fibre sprinkle high fibre cereal on top. Pick cereals with little added sugar and/or salt.
- When making pancakes, muffins or other baked goods substitute up to half of the white flour with whole wheat flour.

Tips to help you eat more legumes (dried peas, beans, lentils)

- Soak and cook dried beans or lentils when you have time; use canned beans as a quick and healthy alternative. Be sure to rinse canned beans well first to help decrease sodium.
- Add chickpeas, lentils or other beans to salads, soups or casseroles.
- Serve bean dip such as hummus with crackers or raw vegetables for appetizers.
- Eat vegetarian meals several times a week. Try bean or lentil based soups; vegetables stir fries with tofu or bean burritos.
- Make dishes that traditionally have meat with legumes or tofu instead. Add black beans to meatless pasta sauce; make meatless chili with several different kinds of beans.
- Add small amounts of legumes to meat dishes. Add cooked mashed lentils to meat spaghetti sauce.

Tips to help you eat more vegetables

- Make a vegetable stir-fry. Serve each person 250 mL (1 cup) of stir-fried vegetables with a small amount of cooked chicken, tofu or seafood on top of brown rice or whole wheat pasta.
- Add extra veggies like tomato, cucumber and sliced peppers to sandwiches
- Snack on raw veggies while preparing dinner.
- Add chopped red and green peppers, mushrooms, onions and zucchini to scrambled eggs.
- Use pre-washed or pre-cut vegetables if you are tight on time. These vegetables are ready to be quickly steamed, tossed into a salad or packed to go for lunch.
- Start your meal with a spinach or romaine salad topped with a low-fat dressing.
- Keep frozen vegetables on hand for a quick addition to any meal.
- Pack low sodium vegetable juice with lunch.

- Add vegetables such as grated carrots or zucchini to muffins and quickbreads.
- Roast a big batch of mixed vegetables. Serve 250 mL (1 cup) of veggies with a barley pilaf and poached salmon. Toss extra leftover roasted vegetables with whole wheat penne and lentil tomato sauce or puree them and make a soup.

NOTE: Avoid overcooking vegetables. Heat sensitive vitamins can be lost in cooking. Cook vegetables in small amounts of water.

Tips to help you eat more fruit

- Make a fruit based smoothie: blend a banana with blueberries and low fat yogurt.
- Add berries, fresh or frozen, to homemade bran muffins. Try blueberries, chopped strawberries, raspberries and blackberries.
- Choose larger pieces of fruits. These are often equal to two servings.
- Have fresh or dried fruit on hand for snacking.
- Top romaine or spinach salads with fruit. Pear, papaya, dried cranberries and orange all work well.
- Serve a mango salsa with grilled fish or chicken.
- Mix yogurt with chopped fresh fruit.
- Add fresh, frozen or dried fruit to your breakfast cereal.
- Use fruit puree instead of fat in baking. Replace 125 mL (½ cup) of fat (oil or butter) with 125 mL (½ cup) of fruit puree like applesauce or mashed banana.
- Serve fresh fruit or fruit salad for dessert.

NOTE: Choose whole fruit over juice more often. One half-cup serving of pure unsweetened fruit juice counts as a serving of fruit, but it does not contain any of the fibre of the whole fruit. Fruit juice is also a source of natural sugar so limit yourself to no more than 125 mL (½ cup) per day.



Additional Resources

- Health Canada, "Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide - Vegetables and Fruit" www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/food-guide-aliment/choose-choix/fruit/index-eng.php
- Canadian Cancer Society www.cancer.ca
- American Institute of Cancer Research www.aicr.org

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Notes

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