

Is it possible to prevent cancer?

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By [Kay Quinn](#), Healthbeat Reporter

St. Louis, MO (KSDK) - Even if you're well, chances are cancer is one of your top health worries.

But there are steps you can take to prevent it, and we're going to explore those with you through our new project, "8 Ways to Prevent Cancer." We're looking for your questions, and each week we'll answer one on the air.

This week, we answer the question: is it really possible to prevent cancer?

"We can definitely reduce risk and prevent cancer," says Dr. Graham Colditz, a researcher at the Siteman Cancer Center.

Cancer. The word conjures up images of tumors, chemotherapy, hair loss.

But Dr. Colditz has spent his career reframing it. Cancer, according to his research, is something we can keep at bay.

"Whether it's stopping smoking, increasing physical activity, weight loss or avoiding weight gain, healthy diet, those strategies definitely translate into significant reductions in cancer, prevention of cancer," says Dr. Colditz.


There are in fact eight areas where simple changes will cut your cancer risk. Eat a healthy diet, maintain a healthy weight, exercise regularly, don't smoke, drink alcohol in moderation, if at all, protect yourself from the sun and sexually transmitted disease and get regular screening tests. Dr. Colditz was asked to pick just one to get you started.

"I think in America today we can all increase how much we walk," says Dr. Colditz, "how much we're spending effort at being physically active that probably then ties into watching our weight and avoiding more weight gain."

And even if you've been overweight or smoking a pack a day for years, it's never too late for an ounce of prevention to put you on the road toward a pound of cure.

"It's very clear it's not too late to change and reap the benefit of making a lifestyle change," says Dr. Colditz.

Even something as simple as taking a baby aspirin a day has been shown to cut the risk of colon and other cancers in half.

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8 Ways to Stay Healthy and Prevent Cancer

Over half of all serious disease in the United States could be prevented if people adopted healthier lifestyles. By following these eight recommendations, you can lower your risk of cancer, heart disease,



stroke, osteoporosis and diabetes. Before you know it, you'll also have more energy and get a boost to your mood.

So take control of your health, and encourage your family to do the same. Choose one or two of the behaviors below to start with. Once you've got those down, move on to the others.

1. Maintain a Healthy Weight

Keeping your weight in check is often easier said than done, but a few simple tips can help. First off, if you're overweight, focus initially on not gaining any more weight. This by itself can improve your health. Then, when you're ready, try to take off some extra pounds for an even greater health boost. To see where you fall on the weight range, [click here](#).

Tips

- Integrate physical activity and movement into your life.
- Eat a diet rich in fruits, vegetables and whole grains.
- Choose smaller portions and eat more slowly.

For Parents and Grandparents

- Limit children's TV and computer time.
- Encourage healthy snacking on fruits and vegetables.
- Encourage activity during free time.

2. Exercise Regularly

Few things are as good for you as regular physical activity. While it can be hard to find the time, it's important to fit in at least 30 minutes of activity every day. More is even better, but any amount is better than none.

Tips

- Choose activities you enjoy. Many things count as exercise, including walking, gardening and dancing.
- Make exercise a habit by setting aside the same time for it each day. Try going to the gym at lunchtime or taking a walk regularly after dinner.
- Stay motivated by exercising with someone.

For Parents and Grandparents

- Play active games with your kids regularly and go on family walks and bike rides when the weather allows.
- Encourage children to play outside (when it's safe) and to take part in organized activities, including soccer, gymnastics and dancing.
- Walk with your kids to school in the morning. It's great exercise for everyone.

3. Don't Smoke

You've heard it before: If you smoke, quitting is absolutely the best thing you can do for your health. Yes, it's hard, but it's also far from impossible. More than 1,000 Americans stop for good every day.

Tips

- Keep trying! It often takes six or seven tries before you quit for good.
- Talk to a health-care provider for help.
- Join a quit-smoking program. Your workplace or health plan may offer one.

For Parents and Grandparents

- Try to quit as soon as possible. If you smoke, your children will be more likely to smoke.
- Don't smoke in the house or car. If kids breathe in your smoke, they may have a higher risk of breathing problems and lung cancer.
- When appropriate, talk to your kids about the dangers of smoking and chewing tobacco. A health-care professional or school counselor can help.

4. Eat a Healthy Diet

Despite confusing news reports, the basics of healthy eating are actually quite straightforward. You should focus on fruits, vegetables and whole grains and keep red meat to a minimum. It's also important to cut back on bad fats (saturated and trans fats) and choose healthy fats (polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats) more often. Taking a multivitamin with folate every day is a great nutrition insurance policy.

Tips

- Make fruits and vegetables a part of every meal. Put fruit on your cereal. Eat vegetables as a snack.
- Choose chicken, fish or beans instead of red meat.
- Choose whole-grain cereal, brown rice and whole-wheat bread over their more refined counterparts.
- Choose dishes made with olive or canola oil, which are high in healthy fats.
- Cut back on fast food and store-bought snacks (like cookies), which are high in bad fats.
- Buy a 100 percent RDA multivitamin that contains folate.

5. Drink Alcohol Only in Moderation, If at All

Moderate drinking is good for the heart, as many people already know, but it can also increase the risk of cancer. If you don't drink, don't feel that you need to start. If you already drink moderately (less than one drink a day for women, less than two drinks a day for men), there's probably no reason to stop. People who drink more, though, should cut back.

Tips

- Choose nonalcoholic beverages at meals and parties.
- Avoid occasions centered around alcohol.
- Talk to a health-care professional if you feel you have a problem with alcohol.

For Parents and Grandparents

- Avoid making alcohol an essential part of family gatherings.
- When appropriate, discuss the dangers of drug and alcohol abuse with children. A health-care professional or school counselor can help.

6. Protect Yourself from the Sun

While the warm sun is certainly inviting, too much exposure to it can lead to skin cancer, including serious melanoma. Skin damage starts early in childhood, so it's especially important to protect children.

Tips

- Steer clear of direct sunlight between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. (peak burning hours). It's the best way to protect yourself.
- Wear hats, long-sleeve shirts and sunscreens with SPF15 or higher.
- Don't use sun lamps or tanning booths. Try self-tanning creams instead.

For Parents and Grandparents

- Buy tinted sunscreen so you can see if you've missed any spots on a fidgety child.
- Set a good example for children by also protecting yourself with clothing, shade and sunscreen.

7. Protect Yourself From Sexually Transmitted Infections

Among other problems, sexually transmitted infections – like human papillomavirus (HPV) – are linked to a number of different cancers. Protecting yourself from these infections can lower your risk.

Tips

- Aside from not having sex, the best protection is to be in a committed, monogamous relationship with someone who does not have a sexually transmitted infection.
- For all other situations, be sure to always use a condom and follow other safe-sex practices.
- Never rely on your partner to have a condom. Always be prepared.

For Parents and Grandparents

- When appropriate, discuss with children the importance of abstinence and safe sex. A health-care professional or school counselor can help.

8. Get Screening Tests

There are a number of important tests that can help protect against cancer, heart disease, stroke, diabetes and osteoporosis. Some of these tests find diseases early, when they are most treatable, while others can actually help keep a disease from developing in the first place. Talk to a health-care professional about which tests you should have and when.

Conditions that should be tested for regularly include:

- Colon and rectal cancer
- Breast cancer
- Cervical cancer
- High blood pressure
- Unhealthy blood cholesterol
- Obesity or being overweight
- Low bone density