



Cancer week 2009

This week the Cancer Society holds its 'Daffodil Day'. Cancer affects 1 in 3 New Zealanders.

While we can never guarantee that a certain lifestyle will prevent cancer there are some nutritional approaches that may help you reduce your risk of cancer.

It is estimated that nutrition is linked to one third of all cancers in industrial countries.

In 2007 the World Cancer Research Fund/American Institute for Cancer Research report, *Food, Nutrition, Physical Activity, and the Prevention of Cancer: a Global Perspective* was released. This report focused on the role of food, nutrition and physical activity.

One of the report's top recommendations was to be as lean as possible without becoming underweight. There is convincing that weight gain and obesity increase the risk of some cancers, especially bowel and breast cancer. Maintaining a healthy weight through a balanced diet and regular physical activity will help keep your risk lower.

The second recommendation is to be physically active everyday for at least 30 minutes. There is strong evidence that physical activity protects against cancers, including bowel and breast cancer.

Of course physical activity is also a key factor that can help with maintaining a healthy weight. Any exercise is considered to be beneficial. As fitness levels improve the goal is to aim for longer duration, or alternatively increase the intensity of the exercise.

Another recommendation was to decrease the consumption of energy dense foods and to avoid sugar-rich drinks. These foods typically have a low nutrient value, contributing little in the way of essential nutrients such as vitamins and minerals.

Foods like biscuits, chocolates, chips and fast foods are all energy dense. These foods can easily lead to weight gain which in turn can lead to a higher risk of developing cancer.

Evidence shows that vegetables, fruits and other foods containing dietary fibre (such as wholegrains and pulses) may protect against a range of cancers including mouth, stomach and bowel cancer. They also help to protect against weight gain and obesity.

Limiting your intake of red meat and processed meats is also recommended. The report recommends an intake of less than 500 grams cooked (700-750 grams raw)

red meat each week. In general, based on information from the 1997 National Nutrition Survey and industry consumption figures for New Zealand it appears that our red meat intake is already below this recommended intake.

When it comes to processed meats such as bacon, ham, salami we should be trying to eat very little, if any of these meats.

Other recommendations in the report included limiting alcohol to no more than two drinks a day for men and one drink a day for women.

Foods with a high salt content should also be limited as it is probable that a high salt intake causes stomach cancer.

Aiming to get your nutrition from whole foods rather than nutritional supplements was also recommended as research shows that high-dose nutrient supplements can affect our risk of cancer.

If you want to lower your risk of cancer try to base your diet around lots of fruit and vegetables, whole grain breads and cereals as this usually helps with weight management. Limit your intake of fatty and sugary foods which are also often the foods that are highly processed and therefore higher in salt as well.

Aim to have some non-red meat meals each week. Choose fish (tinned or fresh) or chicken without the skin, or introduce some legumes (dried beans and lentils) into your meals - a good alternative source of protein. When looking at your plate still aim to have only a quarter of your plate with the protein portion, have half your plate with a variety of vegetables, on the remaining quarter have some carbohydrate such as rice, pasta or potato.

Look for a form of physical activity you really enjoy so you are more likely to include it as part of your normal routine.

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