

**Module 8: Lifelong Health and Wellness**  
**Topic 2 Content: Cancer Risk Factors and Prevention Strategies**

**Introduction**

# Cancer

## Risk Factors and Prevention Strategies




No one can predict with absolute certainty who will develop cancer. Sometimes it may seem that avoiding cancer is a matter of luck and there is little you can do. While some cancers may not be preventable, there are several strategies you can integrate into your daily life that may reduce your risk of developing certain kinds of cancers. In this interactivity, click each of the images to learn more about risk factors for cancer and prevention strategies.

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#### Avoid Exposure to Carcinogens



### Avoid Exposure to Carcinogens

A carcinogen is a substance that tends to cause cancer. Even though you need some exposure to natural sunlight to produce vitamin D, radiation in the form of sunlight is a common carcinogen when exposure is high. To protect your skin, you can apply a broad spectrum (also called full spectrum) SPF sunscreen that blocks both UVA and UVB light. Remember to reapply the sunscreen as necessary, even in the winter season.

In addition to sunscreen, you can also reduce your risk of developing skin cancer by avoiding exposure to direct sun during the midday hours. Additionally, you can wear a wide-brimmed hat and sunglasses, or you can stay in shaded areas. Remember that skin cancer can develop anywhere on the skin, even areas of skin that are not often exposed to the sun.

Although sunlight is necessary to sustain life on Earth, other carcinogens are not necessary. Tobacco products can cause lung cancer, among many others. Excess use of alcohol is linked to mouth and throat cancer.

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**Avoid Contracting an STD**

## Avoid Contracting an STD



Contracting a sexually transmitted disease, or STD, is a risk factor for developing certain kinds of cancer. For example, women who contract the human papillomavirus, or HPV, have an increased risk of developing cervical cancer. Women can reduce their risk of developing cervical cancer by getting the HPV vaccine, avoiding exposure to HPV or using protective measures, or getting regular pap smear examinations that screen for developing cervical cancer.


The hepatitis B virus is another sexually transmitted virus that can potentially cause liver cancer, so avoiding sexual activity or using other protective measures can help reduce the risk of developing liver cancer.


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**Eat a Nutritious Diet**

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A prevention strategy that can reduce your cancer risk as well as contribute to overall health is to eat a well-balanced, nutritious diet. Make sure you regularly include a diverse range of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains in your diet. The vitamins and minerals found in nutritious whole foods are key to maintaining your immune system, which can better keep potential cancer growths in check before they become a serious health problem.

Of course, maintaining a regular fitness program that incorporates adequate exercise is also important to boosting your immune system and achieving overall health.

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#### Look for Signs of Cancer

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Detecting cancer is often the first and most important step to any treatment. By performing regular self-exams, you can become familiar with how your healthy body looks and feels, and you will be more likely to spot signs of possible cancer should they appear. For example, if you have any moles on your skin, pay attention to how they look. A change in size or color may be an indicator of cancer growth.

If you suspect you may have signs of cancer, you should consult your doctor because further testing is needed to know for sure. If you get regular physicals or check-ups, your primary care physician can recommend what types of cancer screenings would benefit you most. For example, regular pap smears are recommended for women to detect signs of cervical cancer. Sometimes, genetic tests are an option for determining the risk of developing certain cancers.

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