

REDUCE YOUR RISK OF CANCER

By making some small changes to your lifestyle, you could reduce your risk of developing cancer by more than a third. **Judy Hobson** reports

WHILE THERE'S little you can do about your genetic make-up, and no way of halting the ageing process – the main cause of cancer – you can give yourself the best chance of keeping the disease at bay simply by being more physically active, watching your weight and quitting smoking.

Since the Nineties, the number of people diagnosed with cancer in the UK has increased by 12 per cent, largely due to the fact that we are living longer. The biggest risk factor for developing cancer is our age. After the mid-thirties our cell system starts to break down. If there's too much damage, cells start to get out of control, divide and create more cells that can eventually form a tumour.

There are now 352,000 cases of cancer a year in the UK – 179,000 men and 173,000 women. However, the charity Cancer Research UK (CRUK) says 42 per cent of these could be prevented if we changed our lifestyle.

Indeed, leading cancer expert Professor Karol Sikora,

Be physically active

Simply being more active can reduce your risk of developing two of the most common cancers in the UK – breast and bowel. Both are linked to inactivity.

Fiona Osgun, senior health information officer for CRUK, says: "Anything that gets you out of breath will help, such as ten minutes of weeding, some housework or leaving the car at home and walking to the shops. The important thing is to fit more activity into your daily routine."

The hormone oestrogen fuels many breast and womb cancers. Being physically active can bring down oestrogen levels and therefore reduce the risk.

Physical activity also helps food to move more quickly through the bowels. This cuts the amount of time the lining of the bowel is in contact with any harmful chemicals released after someone has eaten red or processed meat and thus limits any damage that could eventually lead to cancer.

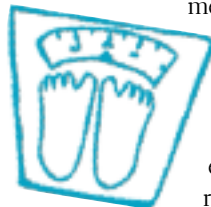


"The number one way to reduce your risk of cancer is to improve your diet"

Cancer expert Prof Karol Sikora

cancer is well established. The secret is to eat red and processed meats only occasionally and to consume lots of vegetables and fruit because they're known to have a protective effect."

"While an occasional bacon sandwich shouldn't do you much harm, don't have red meat every evening; eat some fish or chicken instead."



Government guidelines advise eating just 500g of red meat a week.

Quit smoking

A fifth of all cancers in this country could be prevented if people gave up smoking. It is the most common cause of cancer death in the UK and

linked to 14 different cancers. While smoking causes four out of five cases of lung cancer, it is also associated with cancer of the mouth, the larynx, pancreas, bowel, stomach, kidney and bladder.

Tobacco smoke, Miss Osgun points out, consists of a cocktail of carcinogens which, when you breathe them in, damages the DNA in your cells and makes them incapable of repairing themselves.

Drink less alcohol

Alcohol is one of the biggest risk factors for cancer. Every year it is responsible for 12,800 cases of cancer in the UK. It causes seven different forms – liver, bowel, breast, oesophageal, larynx, mouth and upper throat. Because of its effects on oestrogen and other hormones, alcohol consumption is linked to a high risk of breast cancer.

Miss Osgun says: "No alcohol is the best policy, because where cancer is concerned there's no

safe level. If you do drink, the best advice is to keep within the government's new recommended limits because then you'll only have a slightly increased risk of developing the disease."

Take care in the sun

Worryingly, despite CRUK's Sun Smart campaign, the UK is seeing an increase in skin cancer, particularly among



"Being more active could prevent 3400 cases of cancer a year"

Fiona Osgun of Cancer Research UK



Add milk to your cuppa

While there is no evidence to show that coffee and tea may cause cancer, the International Agency for Research on Cancer warned in June that very hot drinks – those consumed at more than 65°C – put drinkers at risk of oesophageal cancer. The warning came after animal studies showed that very hot water can promote tumour growth.

However, you can still enjoy your favourite beverage because, in Europe, both coffee and tea are normally drunk at below 60°C and cold milk is frequently added to cool them down.



Be aware

Look after yourself and watch out for early symptoms, Prof Sikora advises.

"If we can treat your cancer before it has spread, you will have a much greater chance of recovery. If you have a symptom that persists for a couple of weeks, such as a cough, a headache, a pain, tiredness or you have found difficulty passing urine, make a doctor's appointment immediately."

Prof Sikora, who is dean of the University of Buckingham's medical school and a consultant oncologist, has just published *The Street-wise Patient's Guide to Surviving Cancer*. The paperback version costs £9.95 and is available from publisher Edward Everett Root (ISBN 978-1911204114), website: (www.eerpublishing.com/sikora/html).

older people. Over exposure to ultra-violet light from the sun or sunbeds is the main cause of this cancer.

Prof Sikora says: "People with very fair skin and red or fair hair need to take particular care. It's also important that older folk, especially men with thinning hair, remember to wear a hat when they're out and about in the sunshine."

When the sun is strong, Miss Osgun advises everyone if possible to stay in the shade between 11am and 3pm, or to cover themselves up and then regularly apply a sun screen with a protection factor of at least 15 to any exposed areas.

Your microwave

According to the World Health Organisation, when you follow the manufacturer's instructions, a microwave oven is safe to use because its design ensures its high-frequency radio waves



are contained within the oven.

However, leakage can occur around damaged or modified ovens so you need to ensure yours is in good condition. Check that the door closes properly and the seals are undamaged.

Mobile phones

These are currently the subject of a long-term study examining their use and its effect on users' health. In the meantime, if you use one a lot, Prof Sikora advises you to use an earpiece and to keep your mobile at a distance to reduce radiation.

Find out more

For more on cancer prevention, log on to: (www.cancerresearchuk.org/aboutcancer).