

# Reduce your risk of cancer by taking three positive steps



irish  
cancer  
society



EAT A HEALTHY DIET • BE PHYSICALLY ACTIVE • BE A HEALTHY WEIGHT



Source: World Cancer Research Fund (WCRF UK)

# Three positive steps to reduce your risk of cancer

eat a healthy diet  
be physically active  
be a healthy weight

You have the power to reduce your cancer risk by one-third by eating a healthy diet, being physically active and being a healthy weight.

This 3-step guide will help you achieve a healthier lifestyle that will not only reduce your risk of cancer, but leave you feeling great and with more energy.

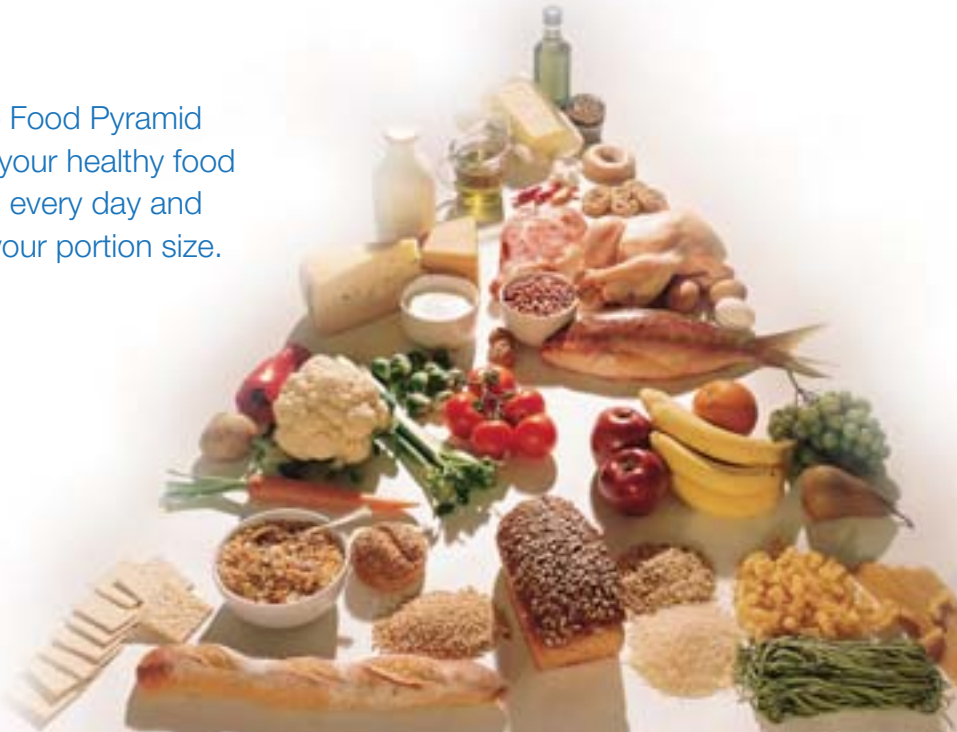


## eat a healthy diet

The type of foods you eat can help you reduce your cancer risk. Your body needs nutrients from food to give you energy, keep you warm and protect you from disease. You can make food choices that give you a greater chance of avoiding cancer as well as meeting your body's needs.

The Food Pyramid tells you what makes up a healthy balanced diet. Following its guidelines increases your chance of staying healthy and reduces your cancer risk. Use it to plan your daily diet. *See full size Food Pyramid overleaf.*

Use the Food Pyramid to plan your healthy food choices every day and watch your portion size.





## Cut down on foods high in calories, fat and sugar

This includes cakes, sweets and biscuits. Many foods from the top of the Food Pyramid are high in calories, fat and sugar and are low in nutrients. Cutting down on them can help you avoid becoming overweight or obese and reduce your cancer risk.



**Cutting down on foods high in calories, fats and sugar reduces your risk of a number of cancers, such as bowel and breast cancer (in postmenopausal women)**



## Eat more fruit, vegetables, wholegrains and pulses

### Fruit & Vegetable

- Eat at least five portions of a variety of fruit and vegetables a day
- Use fresh, tinned (in natural juices or light syrup), frozen or dried fruit and vegetables
- Smoothies, vegetable soups, stews and casseroles can also help to boost your intake
- Remember fruit juices are high in sugar, so keep to one serving per day (150 ml)

By choosing a good selection of brightly coloured fruit and vegetables, like peppers, tomatoes and berries in season, you will get many of the important nutrients your body needs.



### Wholegrains

Wholegrains help you to stay full for longer, keep a healthy weight and may reduce your risk of some cancers.

To increase your intake of wholegrains each day choose:

- brown bread instead of white
- porridge or wholegrain cereals for a healthy breakfast
- brown rice instead of white rice
- wholewheat pasta instead of ordinary pasta

# Use the Food Pyramid to plan your choices every day and watch your

Choose  
**very small**  
amounts

**Fats, High Fat**  
Use sparingly –  
Only have small

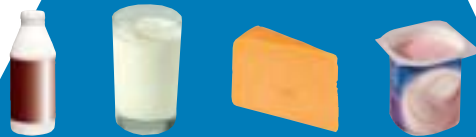


Choose any **2**

**Meat**  
Choose



Choose any **3**



Choose  
any **5**



Choose  
any **6+**



## Drink water regularly - at least 8 cups a day

FOLIC ACID - AN ESSENTIAL INGREDIENT IN MAKING A BABY. YOU CAN GET FOLIC ACID FROM FOOD. IF YOU ARE PLANNING TO BECOME PREGNANT THEN YOU SHOULD BE TAKING A FOLIC ACID TABLET (400 MICROGRAMS)

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# healthy food portion size

## Limit Fat/Sugar Snacks, Foods and Drinks

Choose fats high in monounsaturates or polyunsaturates. Limit fried foods to 1-2 times a week. Limit amounts of high fat/sugar snacks and drinks and not too often.



## Meat, Fish, Eggs & Alternatives

Choose lean cuts of meats. Eat oily fish.



## Milk, Cheese & Yogurt

Choose low fat varieties.



## Fruit & Vegetables

Choose green leafy vegetables and citrus fruit frequently. Fruit juice only counts for one serving, each day.



## Bread, Cereals & Potatoes

Eat these foods at each meal – high fibre is best.



EAT AT LEAST 5 SERVINGS OF GREEN LEAFY VEGETABLES BUT IF THERE IS ANY POSSIBILITY THAT YOU COULD EAT MORE, EAT MORE (5 IS PER DAY).

Source: Health Promotion Unit, Department of Health and Children

## Pulses

Pulses, such as peas, beans and lentils, are good to include in your diet most days. They are high in fibre and protein and can help keep hunger pangs away.

- Tinned versions are convenient. Remember to drain away any liquid from the tin as it may be high in salt
- Add them to salads, casseroles or soups



**Fruit, vegetables, wholegrains and pulses are generally low in calories and fat so they are a good food choice to help you watch your weight and reduce your cancer risk. They also contain:**

- **vitamins and minerals that help keep the body healthy and strengthen the immune system**
- **antioxidants that help protect cells in the body from damage that can lead to cancer**
- **fibre that is linked to a reduced cancer risk**



## Limit your intake of red and processed meat

Meat is rich in valuable nutrients like protein and iron, but when taken in large amounts it can increase your risk of certain cancers. Therefore:

- Limit your intake to 500g or 18oz of cooked lean red meat per week (800g / 28oz of lean raw meat). This can be split into four or five portions over the week

RED MEAT	Cooked weight
Pork or lamb chop	75g
'Quarterpounder' beefburger	90g
Medium portion of roast beef, lamb or pork	90g
Medium steak	145g

- Limit or avoid eating processed meat. Choosing not to include processed meat in your diet can make a difference to your risk of cancer



## What are processed meats?

Processed meats are meats that have been smoked, cured, salted or had chemical preservatives added. Sausages, hams, salami, pastrami, hot dogs and rashers are some examples.

### You could try:

- Eggs (poached or scrambled) for breakfast
- Chicken or turkey (with the skin removed) or salmon for sandwiches or salads
- Spicy chicken instead of pepperoni on pizza
- Fresh/canned fish, chicken or other forms of poultry instead of red meat a couple of days a week
- A meat-free day



**A diet high in red and processed meat is linked to bowel cancer. Stick to the recommended weekly amount to reduce your risk**



## Limit your intake of alcohol

Drinking alcohol increases your risk of cancer. To reduce the risk, avoid or limit your intake to:

- Men – no more than two standard drinks per day
- Women – one standard drink per day

### What is a standard drink?

- ½ pint of beer, lager, cider or stout
- 1 measure of spirits
- 125ml of wine (small glass)





## Limit your intake of salt

Salt is needed for human health, but Irish people take almost twice as much as they need. Many foods contain salt, such as breads and processed foods like meats, ready meals and pizzas, sauces, crackers, cakes, snack foods and cereals. Food does not have to taste salty to have high levels of salt in it.

### To cut down your intake of salt:

- Use mainly fresh ingredients when cooking
- Choose foods low in salt – try spicy flavours instead
- Cut out salt when cooking and at the table
- Flavour foods with black pepper, herbs, lemon juice, garlic and spices



**Salt and foods preserved with salt are most likely a cause of stomach cancer**



## Dietary supplements are not a replacement for a healthy balanced diet

Most people can get all the nutrients they need by following a healthy balanced diet using the Food Pyramid. The best source of nourishment is food and drink, not dietary supplements. There may be times during your life when your doctor or dietitian may advise you to take supplements for a period of time. Otherwise, there is no need.



## be physically active

Being physically active helps avoid weight gain, obesity and reduces your risk of cancer. It also helps prevent heart disease and diabetes, and can make you feel better both physically and mentally.

### How active do you need to be?

- Every little helps but the more active you are the better
- Aim for at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity each day
- If you are already active for 30 minutes every day, you could try doing an extra few minutes. You could also step up the effort. For example, if you like to walk, swing your arms and walk a little faster.

### What is moderate activity?

Moderate activity is any activity that gets your heart beating a little faster than normal and makes you breathe a little deeper and faster. For example, brisk walking.



## How to get started

- Check with your doctor before you start if you have not been active for a while or have health problems
- Start slowly with 10–15 minutes of physical activity three to four times per week
- Gradually build it up to 30 minutes a day
- Two or three short sessions can be used to make up the daily 30 minutes.

You don't have to be sporty to be physically active and it doesn't have to cost money. Walking, cycling and doing vigorous housework, like hoovering, all count. Other ideas are gardening, walking to the shop, taking the stairs instead of the lift, or dancing to your favourite music at home.



**Being physically active can protect you against bowel cancer and most likely breast (in postmenopausal women) and womb cancer too**



## be a healthy weight

Your risk of getting some cancers and other diseases increases if you are overweight or obese. Extra fat stored around your waist puts you at greater risk. There are two ways of finding out if you are a healthy weight:

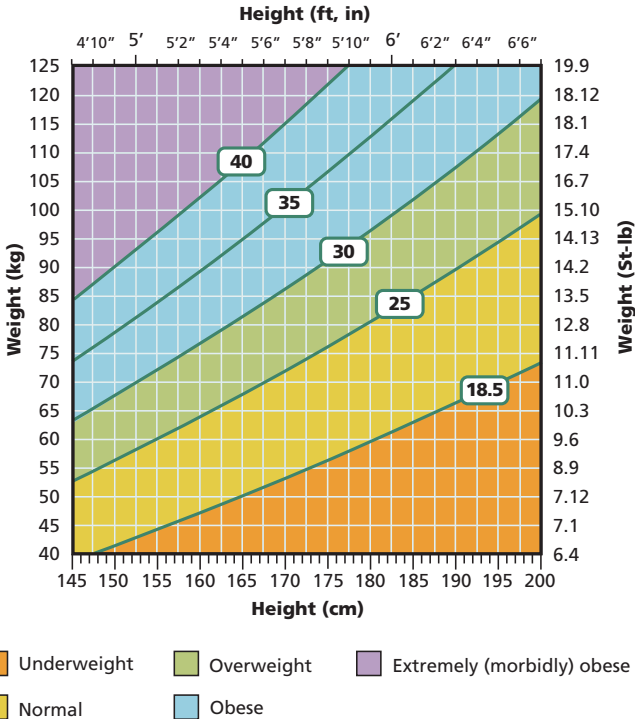
- Body mass index (BMI)
- Waistline measurement



The risk of cancer of the bowel, kidney, womb and breast (in postmenopausal women), oesophagus and pancreas are all strongly linked with being overweight or obese



## Body mass index



Draw a line across from your weight, and up or down from your height. Where these two lines cross is your body mass index. To reduce your cancer risk aim to be at the lower end of the normal BMI range.



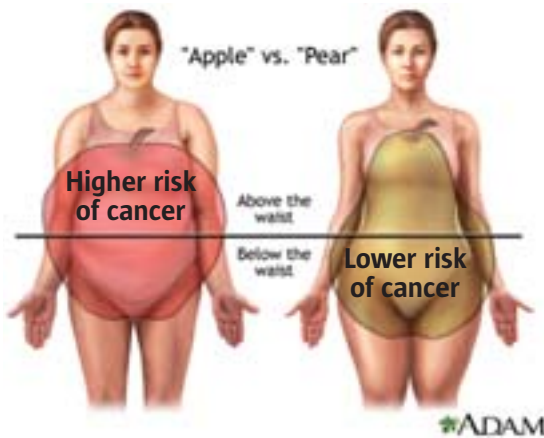
## What does your BMI measurement mean?

- Less than 18.5** You are underweight, which can lead to some health problems
- 18.5-24.9** You are a healthy normal weight and at a lower risk of cancer
- 25-29.9** You are overweight, which increases your cancer risk
- Greater than 30** You are obese and your risk of cancer is even greater

If you are under or overweight, it is important to see your doctor. A medical check-up and advice on diet and lifestyle may be needed. Remember, BMI is not always an accurate measure if you are an athlete, pregnant or very short in height.



## Waistline measurement



### To measure your waistline:

- Find the top of your hipbone
- At this point, measure around your waist. Make sure the tape measure is snug but not marking your skin
- Take the measurement at the end of your normal breath

### You are at increased risk of cancer if:

- your waistline is greater than 94 cm or 37 inches for men
- and is greater than 80 cm or 31.5 inches for women.

### If you are a healthy weight keep it that way:

- Be physically active
- Eat a healthy, varied diet as shown in the Food Pyramid
- Watch your portion size. See the Food Pyramid for guidelines
- Snack on fruit and vegetables if you are hungry
- Check food labels. Low fat foods that are high in sugar may not help you keep a healthy weight

# other important information

## Breastfeed your baby – if you can

Breastfeeding helps to protect mothers against breast cancer. It is the ideal way to provide babies with all the nutrients they need and help to reduce their risk of becoming overweight and obese at the same time. For this reason, it is best to breastfeed your baby for the first six months, if possible. After that, continue to breastfeed as you add other liquids and food to your baby's diet.

## Advice for cancer survivors

Research has shown that eating a healthy diet, being physically active and being a healthy weight may help reduce your risk of cancer coming back. Follow our cancer prevention advice for diet, physical activity and weight. Make sure to check with your doctor first that the prevention advice is suitable for you.

## Method of cooking

Some research says that how you cook your food may increase your cancer risk. Choose baking, boiling, steaming or stir frying as healthy cooking methods. This will also limit your intake of fat and reduce your risk of being overweight.



# The European Code Against Cancer

The European Code Against Cancer outlines healthier lifestyle choices that can help you avoid certain cancers and improve your general health. These include:

- If you smoke, plan to quit
- Eat at least five servings a day of a variety of fruits and vegetables
- Limit your intake of fatty foods
- If you drink alcohol, limit your intake to no more than:  
Men – two standard drinks per day  
Women – one standard drink per day
- Do brisk physical activity every day
- Be a healthy weight
- Protect yourself from the sun and avoid sunburn, especially in children
- See a doctor if you notice a lump, a sore that does not heal, a mole that changes in shape, size or colour, or bleeds in unusual circumstances
- See a doctor if you have persistent problems, such as an ongoing cough or hoarseness, a change in bowel or bladder habit, or unexpected weight loss
- Women from 25 years of age should avail of cervical screening
- Women from 50 years of age should avail of breast screening

## Further information:

### **How often should you have a free cervical smear?**

- Women aged 25–44: every 3 years
- Women aged 45–60: every 5 years

### **How often should you have a free mammogram?**

- Women aged 50–64: every 2 years

**For further information on BreastCheck and CervicalCheck call:**

**1800 45 45 55**

# useful contacts

The Health Promotion Department of the Irish Cancer Society has a wide range of leaflets and factsheets about a variety of cancers. To order them, please contact us on **01 231 0539**.

Anyone who is concerned about cancer can speak with a specialist nurse in confidence by calling the National Cancer Helpline on **1800 200 700**. The Helpline is open Mon–Thurs 9am–7pm, Fridays 9am–5pm.

Those who wish to speak to a specialist nurse can also contact us through our:

- **Walk-in service** – visit us in person at the Irish Cancer Society offices at 43/45 Northumberland Road, Dublin 4
- **Email service** – email us at **helpline@irishcancer.ie**
- **CancerChat** – chat live on the web with a specialist cancer nurse by logging onto **www.cancer.ie**
- **Message board** – visit our online bulletin board at: **www.cancer.ie**



**Reference:** Food, Nutrition, Physical Activity, and the Prevention of Cancer: a Global Perspective. Washington DC: AICR/WCRF, 2007



National Cancer Helpline: **Freefone 1800 200 700**

**[www.cancer.ie](http://www.cancer.ie)**