

Seven Steps for a Healthier New Year

The beginning of a new year is the perfect time to take control of your life and develop strategies to help you reach your goals for the year ahead. For many people one of their main goals is to be healthier.

Did you know that researchers estimate that about one-third of the deaths from cancer can be prevented? Many types of cancer are related to lifestyle factors such as a poor diet, obesity, smoking, and a lack of physical activity. While not all cancers are preventable, the risk of developing a first or second cancer can be greatly reduced by eliminating these types of risk factors. Making positive changes in these behaviors can also lower your risk for other serious diseases as well.

Here are seven tips to help you enjoy a healthier and happier new year:

1. **Stop using tobacco.** If you do nothing else, do this. Stopping tobacco use is the single most important thing you can do to reduce your risk of cancer. Smoking and other types of tobacco use has been linked to cancers of the lung, bladder, pancreas, kidney, nose and mouth, stomach, cervix, prostate, and colon, as well as heart disease, miscarriage, the common cold, ear infections, and asthma and bronchitis among children who breathe in secondhand smoke. [Tobacco products](#) [1], including cigarettes, pipes, cigars, flavored cigars, and chewing tobacco cause at least 30% of all cancer deaths and kill more than 440,000 Americans each year. Remember, it is never too late to benefit from stopping tobacco use, even if you have [already been diagnosed with cancer](#) [2].

2. **Reach and maintain a healthy weight.** Being overweight has been linked to a number of different diseases, including cancer of the breast, colon, esophagus, kidney, prostate, and uterus. When a person is overweight or obese, it means that they have too much body fat in relation to lean body tissue, such as muscle. This ratio of a person's weight, height, and waist measurements is known as their body mass index (BMI). Having a BMI of 25 to 29.9 is considered overweight, and 30 and above is considered obese. Although losing weight can be difficult, being physically active for at least 30 minutes each day and eating a diet rich in vegetables, fruits, and whole grains can help you reach and maintain a healthy weight. Learn more about [weight control](#) [3] and [healthy eating](#) [4].

3. **Exercise regularly.** Several studies have shown that regular physical activity can significantly reduce the risk of breast and colon cancers. What's more, there is evidence showing that exercise may also help prevent other types of cancer, such as uterine, prostate, kidney, and lower esophageal cancers. Regular physical activity also helps you increase fitness, lose or maintain weight, improve heart health, manage stress, and improve mood and self-esteem. Talk with your doctor and health care team about an exercise plan that is appropriate for your medical history and individual fitness goals. Learn more about how [physical activity lowers the risk of cancer](#) [5], in addition to some [recommendations on adding physical activity to your lifestyle](#) [6].

4. **Limit alcohol consumption.** Alcohol has been linked to cancers of the breast, colon, mouth, esophagus, liver, and larynx (voice box). If you drink alcohol, limit yourself to one drink a day for women and two drinks a day for men (whether it's a glass of wine, bottle of beer, or shot of hard liquor) and choose nonalcoholic beverages at meals and parties. Learn more about how [alcohol](#) [7] may influence cancer risk.

5. **Get recommended cancer screenings.** Screenings are examinations and tests done on people who are not having any symptoms in an effort to find cancer at an early stage. People with a family history of cancer may need to be screened earlier or more often than those without a family history of cancer. Talk with your doctor for information about cancer screenings that are appropriate for you. Common screening tests include:

- [Mammography](#) [8]: an x-ray of the breast used to find breast cancer.
- [Pap test](#) [9]: a test where cells are gently scraped from the inside of a woman's cervix and vagina and examined to find cervical cancer.
- Tests used to find colorectal cancer include [colonoscopy](#) [10] (examination that checks the upper and lower part of the colon with a thin, lighted tube), [sigmoidoscopy](#) [11] (a test that allows your doctor to see inside your large intestine), and [fecal occult blood test](#) [12] (used to detect hidden blood in stool [feces]).

Learn more about [cancer screening](#) [13].

6. **Protect your skin from the sun.** Skin cancer is the most common type of cancer diagnosed in the United States. Although most skin cancers develop after age 50, skin damage from sun exposure begins much earlier in life. To protect yourself from the sun's ultraviolet rays, stay out of direct sunlight between 10:00 AM and 4:00 PM; wear a hat, a long-sleeve shirt and pants; and use sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of 30 or higher that protects against both ultraviolet A (UVA) and ultraviolet B (UVB) rays. Read more about [protecting your skin from the sun](#) [14] and the

symptoms of melanoma [15], the most serious and deadly, form of skin cancer.

7. **Know common warning signs of cancer.** Knowing the most common symptoms of cancer is important for helping detect cancer early. Sometimes, people with cancer do not show any symptoms. Or, these symptoms may be similar to symptoms of another medical condition. Talk with your doctor if there is no obvious cause for a symptom or if you have been experiencing it for several weeks. The following are possible symptoms of cancer:

- A change in bowel or bladder habits
- A sore that doesn't heal
- Unusual bleeding or discharge
- A thickening or lump in the breast or any other part of the body
- Difficulty swallowing or chronic indigestion (upset stomach)
- An obvious change in a wart or mole
- Hoarseness or a cough that doesn't go away

More Information

Risk Factors and Prevention [16]

How to Make Positive Lifestyle Changes While Living With Cancer [17]

Links:

- [1] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24553>
- [2] <http://www.cancer.net/node/28476>
- [3] <http://www.cancer.net/node/25008>
- [4] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24984>
- [5] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24967>
- [6] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24996>
- [7] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24981>
- [8] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24584>
- [9] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24638>
- [10] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24481>
- [11] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24678>
- [12] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24523>
- [13] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24972>
- [14] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24659>
- [15] <http://www.cancer.net/node/19255>
- [16] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24868>
- [17] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24583>