

Can You Reduce Your Risk of Breast Cancer?

We hear it all the time...lose weight for your health. Few people however, realize the extent to which this is critical to their physical well-being and ultimately their life expectancy. In January 2003, the Journal of the American Medical Association featured a study finding that obesity appears to lessen life expectancy, especially among young adults. The researchers compared Body-Mass Index (BMI) to longevity and found a correlation between premature death and higher BMIs. For example, a 20-year-old white male, 5'10" weighing 288 pounds with a BMI of greater than 40 was estimated to lose 13 years of his life as a result of obesity. Jamie McManus, M.D., F.A.A.F.P. and author of "Your Personal Guide to Wellness" notes that while this study referenced extreme levels of obesity, there are still millions of overweight people in developed countries with a life expectancy rate that is three to five years less than their healthy-weight counterparts. She also estimates that there are 600,000 obesity related deaths each year in America. Just how does obesity shorten our lifespan? The answer to this question is complex, yet there is a clear link between obesity and the development of cancer. An extensive study conducted by the American Cancer Institute involving 750,000 people showed that obesity significantly increased the risk of cancer developing in the following organs: breast, colon, ovaries, uterus, pancreas, kidneys and gallbladder. Michael Thun, MD, vice-president of epidemiology and surveillance research for the American Cancer Society (ACS) says one reason obesity may raise cancer risk is because fat cells produce a form of estrogen called estradiol that promotes rapid division of cells, increasing chances of a random genetic error while cells are replicating, which can lead to cancer. In addition, fat centered around the abdomen may increase insulin and insulin-like growth factors in the blood, which may increase cancer risk. "Women who are obese after menopause have a 50% higher relative risk of breast cancer," notes Thun, "and obese men have a 40% higher relative risk of colon cancer.... Gallbladder and endometrial cancer risks are five times higher for obese individuals". There is evidence that cancer rates in developed countries are increasing at 5 to 15 times faster than developing countries. A major contributor to this alarming reality has proven to be diet. In populations where the diet consists mostly of fresh fruit and vegetables and whole grains - in contrast to the typical Western diet of fatty meats, refined flours, oils and sugars - the risk of cancer is much lower. The interaction of diet and the development of cancer is an active field of research and Dr David Heber, M.D., Ph.D. and author of "What Color is Your Diet", says "It appears that diet has its most significant effects after the cancer has already formed, acting to inhibit or stimulate the growth of that cancer". At the risk of oversimplifying a complex set of interactions, the typical Western diet that leads to obesity may actually act to stimulate the growth of cancer cells. It is never too late to improve your health through healthful eating and adopting a more health-giving lifestyle. Here are simple steps to follow which can make an immediate improvement to your health and vitality.

1. Check your Body Mass Index (BMI) to determine if weight has become health risk. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 60% of Americans are overweight, defined as having a BMI (a ratio of height to weight) over 25. Of those, nearly half (27%) qualify as obese, with a body mass index of 30 or more. In 1980, just 15% of Americans were considered obese. You can check your BMI at the website below.
2. Match your diet to your body's requirements. If you eat and drink more calories than your body requires you will put on weight. Learn to control calories and portion sizes, make recipes leaner, and eat infrequently from fast food restaurants. Also learn how to snack with healthful choices.
3. Color your diet with a large variety of colorful, cancer-fighting fruit and vegetables. There are seven different color ranges of both fruit and vegetables and by choosing between 5 to 9 daily serves from a wide range of fruit and vegetables, we are extending our consumption of cancer (and other disease) fighting nutrients.
4. Eat lean protein with every meal. Protein provides a powerful signal to the brain providing a longer sense of fullness. The right source of protein is essential to controlling your hunger with fewer calories and necessary to maintain your lean muscle mass. Choices of protein should be flavored soy shakes with fruit; the white meat of chicken and turkey, seafood such as shrimps, prawns scallops and lobster and ocean fish or vegetarians may prefer soy based meat substitutes.
5. Rev up your metabolism with activity. If you want to enjoy a lifetime of well-being, exercise is a key ingredient. Colleen Doyle, MS, RD, director of nutrition and physical activity for the American Cancer Society (ACS), says adults should do something for 30 minutes each day that takes as much effort as a brisk walk. Children should be active for an hour each day. We are more likely to develop habits around things we enjoy, so seek activities which you enjoy doing. It is also helpful to build physical activity into your daily routine: use the stairs instead of the escalator or lift at work, park your car in the parking bay furthest from the super marketing and don't use the remote control to change TV channels.
6. Get support to ensure you develop a healthful eating plan and reach your goal weight. Whilst a small percentage of people possess the discipline to lose weight, many obese people have developed strong thoughts and habits concerning the food they eat. In order to establish new habits, most people respond well to some form of consistent encouragement and coaching. A study, "Effects of Internet Behavioral Counseling on Weight Loss in Adults at Risk of Type 2 Diabetes" shows that participants who had the support of weight loss coaching lost more weight than those who didn't. The study concluded that the support of a weight loss coach can significantly improve weight loss results. Being overweight or obese has been identified next to smoking, as the most preventable major risk to developing cancer. Even small weight losses have been shown to have beneficial health effects. So it's never too late to start and you can never be too young or too old to be concerned about your health and do something about achieving a more healthy weight.

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About the Author

Provides an explanation of how the liver processes different types of foods, and what type of diet is recommended for people.