Eat wholegrains, vegetables, fruit & beans

Make wholegrains, vegetables, fruit and pulses (legumes) such as beans and lentils a major part of your usual daily diet

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One of our Cancer Prevention Recommendations is to make wholegrains, vegetables, fruit, and pulses (legumes) such as beans and lentils a major part of your usual daily diet.

There is evidence that eating wholegrains, fibre, vegetables and fruit can help protect against certain cancers, as well as against weight gain, overweight and obesity.

Eat at least 30g of fibre and at least 400g of fruit and veg each day

There is strong evidence that eating wholegrains (/dietandcancer/exposures/wholegrains-veg-fruit) protects against colorectal cancer (/dietandcancer/colorectal-cancer), and that eating foods containing dietary fibre (/dietandcancer/exposures/wholegrains-veg-fruit) protects against colorectal cancer and against weight gain, overweight and obesity (/dietandcancer/exposures/body-fatness).

Although the evidence for links between individual cancers and consumption of non-starchy vegetables or fruit is limited, the pattern of association and the direction of effect are both consistent. Overall the evidence is more persuasive of a protective effect and that greater consumption of non-starchy vegetables and or fruit helps protects against a number of aerodigestive cancers and some other cancers.

Dietary patterns that are linked to a lower risk of cancer consistently feature high consumption of these foods.

"Our evidence suggests the greatest risk is for people who consume no or hardly any vegetables or fruit, which is why we create healthy recipes that help people towards their 5-A-DAY"
– Dr Rachel Thompson, World Cancer Research Fund International's Head of Research Interpretation

Dietary goals

- Consume a diet that provides at least 30g per day of fibre from food
- Include foods containing wholegrains, non-starchy vegetables, fruit and pulses (legumes) such as beans and lentils in most meals
- Eat a diet high in all types of plant foods including at least five portions or servings (at least 400g or 15oz in total) of a variety of non-starchy vegetables and fruit every day
- If you eat starchy roots and tubers as staple foods, eat non-starchy vegetables, fruit and pulses (legumes) regularly too if possible

Protective power of plants

An integrated approach to considering the evidence shows that most diets that are protective against cancer are rich in foods of plant origin.

Relatively unprocessed foods of plant origin are rich in nutrients and dietary fibre. Higher consumption of these foods, instead of processed foods high in fat, refined starches (eg white bread or pasta, biscuits, cakes and pastries) and sugars, would mean a diet is higher in essential nutrients and more effective for regulating energy intake relative to energy expenditure. This could protect against weight gain, overweight and obesity and therefore protect against obesity-related cancers.

What should we be eating?

- non-starchy vegetables and fruit of different colours
- non-starchy roots and tubers (eg carrots, artichokes, celeriac (celery root), swede (rutabaga), turnips)
- wholegrains (eg brown rice, wheats, oats, barley and rye)

Traditional food systems

In many parts of the world, traditional food systems are based on roots or tubers such as cassava, sweet potatoes, yams and taro. Where appropriate, traditional food systems should be protected – in addition to their cultural value, and their suitability to local climate and terrain, they are often nutritionally superior to the diets that tend to displace them.

However, monotonous traditional diets, especially those that contain only small amounts of non-starchy vegetables, fruit and pulses (legumes), are likely to be low in essential micronutrients and thereby increase susceptibility to some cancers.

Public health and policy implications

A whole-of-government, whole-of-society approach is necessary to create environments for people and communities that are conducive to eating a diet rich in wholegrains, vegetables, fruit and beans.

A comprehensive package of policies is needed to enable and encourage people to eat enough wholegrains, vegetables, fruit and beans, including policies that influence the food environment, the food system and behaviour change communication across the life course. Globally, food systems that are directed towards foods of plant rather than animal origin are more likely to contribute to a sustainable ecological environment. Policymakers are encouraged to frame specific goals and actions according to their national context. Find out more on policy action for cancer prevention (/dietandcancer/recommendations/policy-public-health-implications).

Our Recommendations work together as an overall way of living healthily to prevent cancer. Download the full chapter PDF below

LIMIT CONSUMPTION OF RED AND PROCESSED MEAT
LIMIT CONSUMPTION OF SUGAR SWEETENED DRINKS
LIMIT CONSUMPTION OF 'FAST FOODS' AND OTHER PROCESSED FOODS HIGH IN FAT, STARCHES OR SUGARS
LIMIT ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION
World Cancer Research Fund
American Institute for Cancer Research
EAT A DIET RICH IN WHOLEGRAINS, VEGETABLES, FRUIT AND BEANS
DO NOT USE SUPPLEMENTS FOR CANCER PREVENTION
OUR CANCER PREVENTION RECOMMENDATIONS
Not smoking and avoiding other exposure to tobacco and excess sun are also important in reducing cancer risk. Following these Recommendations is likely to reduce intakes of salt, saturated and trans fats, which together will help prevent other non-communicable diseases.
BE PHYSICALLY ACTIVE
FOR MOTHERS: BREASTFEED YOUR BABY, IF YOU CAN
BE A HEALTHY WEIGHT
AFTER A CANCER DIAGNOSIS: FOLLOW OUR RECOMMENDATIONS, IF YOU CAN

Download the Recommendations chapter

CANCER PREVENTION RECOMMENDATIONS

Download (https://www.wcrf.org/sites/default/files/Cancer-Prevention-Recommendations-2018.pdf)

(https://www.linkedin.com/wcrfint)

FINDINGS BY RISK FACTOR

FINDINGS BY CANCER TYPE

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Introduction (https://www.wcrf.org/dietandcancer/recommendations-about)
- Be a healthy weight (https://www.wcrf.org/dietandcancer/recommendations/be-healthy-weight)
- Be physically active (https://www.wcrf.org/dietandcancer/recommendations/be-physically-active)
- Eat wholegrains, veg, fruit, beans (https://www.wcrf.org/dietandcancer/recommendations/wholegrains-veg-fruit-beans)
- Limit 'fast foods' (https://www.wcrf.org/dietandcancer/recommendations/limit-fast-foods-fat-sugar)
- Limit red & processed meat (https://www.wcrf.org/dietandcancer/recommendations/limit-red-processed-meat)
- Limit sugary drinks (https://www.wcrf.org/dietandcancer/recommendations/limit-sugar-sweetened-drinks)
- Limit alcohol (https://www.wcrf.org/dietandcancer/recommendations/limit-alcohol-consumption)
- Don’t rely on supplements (https://www.wcrf.org/dietandcancer/recommendations/dont-rely-supplements)
- Breastfeed your baby (https://www.wcrf.org/dietandcancer/recommendations/breastfeed-your-baby)
- After a cancer diagnosis (https://www.wcrf.org/dietandcancer/recommendations/during-after-cancer)

VIEW OUR (/DIETANDCANCER/INTERACTIVE-CANCER-RISK-MATRIX)

interactive cancer risk matrix (/dietandcancer/interactive-cancer-risk-matrix)

CANCER PROCESS

What is cancer and how does it develop?

Learn about the hallmarks of cancer (/dietandcancer/cancer-process)

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Resources and toolkits (/dietandcancer/resources-and-toolkit)

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ABOUT US

World Cancer Research Fund International is a leading authority on cancer prevention research related to diet, nutrition and physical activity.

We are a not-for-profit organisation that leads and unifies a network of cancer prevention charities with a global reach. These charities are based in the US, the UK, the Netherlands and Hong Kong.

世界癌症研究基金會

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