



Reduce Your Cancer Risk



**Cancer Prevention &
Research Institute
of Texas**

By Courtney J. Schoessow, MPH, Extension Associate – Health Education, January 2004

(Instructor: PowerPoint slides accompany this leader lesson. If you do not have electronic projection equipment available, you will need to make transparencies of the slides prior to conducting the lesson and have an overhead projector available.)

Before beginning this lesson, I would like to ask a question. Do you believe the risk of getting cancer is predestined? I mean, do you think there is anything you can do to prevent or delay the onset of cancer?

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Good news! Your daily habits—like exercise, diet, tobacco use, and whether or not you use sun protection—can affect your risk for cancer. You have control over:

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- ◆ the amount of exercise you get every day;
- ◆ the types and amount of food you eat each day;
- ◆ smoking, dipping “snuff” or being around secondhand smoke, or even having your children/grandchildren around secondhand smoke; and
- ◆ sun protection.

Increase Physical Activity

Let’s talk about exercise. Increasing your physical activity is one of the most important changes you can make.

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By increasing your physical activity, you lower your risk of:

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- ✓ breast cancer,
- ✓ colon cancer (part of the intestine), and
- ✓ many other cancers!

I’m not saying you have to run a marathon or walk 5 miles a day. The American Cancer Society recommends 30 minutes of moderate exercise at least five days each week.

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For children, the recommended amount of physical activity is 60 minutes on five or more days of the week.

Even if you can’t work out for 30 minutes or more at a time, you may still benefit from doing activity continuously for three 10-minute periods. Any activity—such as walking or gardening or even housework—counts. If you exercise for 10 minutes three times a day, you will have your 30 minutes of exercise for the day.

Words such as light, moderate, and strenuous are used when describing the intensity of an activity.

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- ✓ Light exercise is anything that does not make you breathe heavily.
- ✓ Moderate exercise is when you notice you are breathing more heavily.
- ✓ Strenuous exercise involves rapid breathing.

Walking, swimming, riding a bicycle, and doing chair exercises are all ways to get exercise!

What are some other ways to increase your amount of daily activity?

Acknowledge responses.

You could park your car farther from where you need to go, or walk down every aisle in the grocery store. Instead of driving, walk that half mile to the post office!

You could also participate in another Extension program called *Walk Across Texas*. With *Walk Across Texas*, you can begin or continue a walking program as an individual, as a group, or as a school! It's easy and fun! For example, if you want to walk with a group of people, just find seven friends; log your physical activity, and one person can enter the miles you've logged and the pounds you've lost (if you want to track that) on our Internet site: <http://walkacrosstexas.tamu.edu>. We encourage groups to walk and log their progress for eight weeks. If you want to track your mileage and pounds lost by yourself, you can log onto this website, and it shows you how far across the state (830 miles) you've gone!

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If your county participates in *Walk Across Texas*, you can distribute information about the kickoff event or encourage people to assist in the planning!

Remember, physical activity helps you maintain a healthy weight! Maintaining a healthy weight helps you reduce the risk of:

- ✓ cancer and
- ✓ chronic (life-long) diseases such as heart disease and diabetes.

Maintain a Healthy Weight

According to the American Cancer Society, being overweight or obese increases your risk of several cancers including: cancers of the breast (among women after the age of 50), colon (part of the intestine), endometrium (lining of the uterus), esophagus (the muscular tube that propels food from the mouth to the stomach), and kidney.

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Because excess weight is thought to promote cancer development, the amount of food you eat also makes a difference to your cancer risk. So, if you need to lose weight, don't overeat. When you don't overeat, you eat less calories. You also burn more calories by exercising, like we mentioned earlier.

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I want to stress that not overeating is just as important as exercising. If you are exercising but you are also overeating, your body fat stays high,

and you may not get the same cancer-fighting protection as a person with less body fat.

So, what types of food should you eat? Research has shown that a greater consumption of vegetables and fruits greatly lowers your risk for several cancers, including lung, mouth, esophagus, stomach, and colon.

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Vegetables and fruits are packed with:

- ✓ Vitamins.
- ✓ Minerals.
- ✓ Fiber. Soluble fiber helps also helps reduce blood cholesterol, thereby lowering the risk of coronary heart disease. Good sources of fiber are found in beans, vegetables, whole grains, and fruits.
- ✓ Antioxidants. Antioxidants protect the body against the damage to tissues that occurs constantly as a result of normal metabolism. Because this damage is associated with an increased cancer risk, antioxidants are thought to protect against cancer.
- ✓ Many other beneficial substances.

Because it is not known which components are most protective, the best advice from the American Cancer Society is to eat whole foods rather than nutritional supplements. This is because you cannot get all of the wonderful benefits of vegetables and fruits in a pill form. There are more than 100 healthful compounds found in fruits and vegetables. The small amount of dried powder contained in the supplements that are sold provide only a small fraction of the substances found in whole foods. Many of the benefits of vegetables and fruits are from the combined effect of several of the nutrients they contain and therefore cannot be duplicated in supplements. And, some of the helpful small nutrients (called micronutrients) in plant-based foods are not available as supplements because they have yet to be discovered.

Therefore, eat at least five servings of vegetables and fruits each day, especially those with the most color, which is a sign of high-nutrient content. Eat more vegetables than fruit because fruit has more calories.

It's also important to limit the amount of fat in our diets. Not only is fat high in calories (fat contains more than twice the number of calories of an equal amount of carbohydrate or protein), it also contributes to obesity, which in turn is connected with an increased risk of cancers such as in the colon and prostate. Although all types of fat have similar numbers of calories, there are certain types, such as saturated fats, that may have a greater effect on increasing your cancer risk.

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The fats from meat, milk, and milk products are the main sources of saturated fats in most diets. Many bakery products are also sources of saturated fats. Vegetable oils supply smaller amounts of saturated fat. Therefore, choose lean meats and low-fat dairy products, such as skim or low-fat milk, and substitute vegetable oils (like canola or olive) for butter or lard.

Tobacco Use

Did you know that stopping tobacco use, or not starting, is the single most important action you can take to reduce cancer? It's true! Tobacco use is the most preventable cause of death in our society. It is accountable for at least 30 percent of all cancer deaths. If all adults stopped tobacco use and children did not start, nearly one-third of all cancer deaths would be prevented, and millions of family members and friends would avoid the sickness and premature death of a loved one. The American Cancer Society notes that about half of those who continue to smoke will die prematurely from smoking. Therefore, the best way to avoid getting cancer is not to start using tobacco or to quit using it.

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Smoking causes nearly 87 percent of all lung cancers. Did you know that each year, secondhand smoke may be responsible for around 3,000 lung cancer deaths in non-smoking adults and an additional 35,000 to 40,000 cases of heart disease in non-smokers? Exposure to secondhand smoke also causes health problems such as respiratory illnesses and asthma (especially in young children).

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I can't stress how dangerous tobacco use (cigarette, pipe, smokeless tobacco, or "snuff") is. Tobacco use is associated with cancer of the:

- ✓ cervix,
- ✓ mouth (especially among snuff users, and they have a 50 fold greater risk of cheek and gum cancers),
- ✓ pharynx (upper throat),
- ✓ larynx (primary organ in voice production),
- ✓ esophagus (muscular tube through which food passes from the throat to the stomach),
- ✓ pancreas (long gland that lies behind the stomach; manufactures insulin and digestive enzymes),
- ✓ kidney, and
- ✓ bladder.

If you would like to quit smoking, please call the American Cancer Society at 1-800-ACS-2345 today! They have great resources to help you! We know that smoking is very addictive, and many people feel like failures if they cannot successfully stop smoking. But there are ways to make the environment of others around you safer.

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- ◆ Put it (smoking) outside! Smoking even occasionally inside the home can put over 3,000 chemicals in the air that can be detected up to two weeks later. (**Agent Note:** A future leader lesson you can use is “Put It Outside, Raising Healthy Children.” This curriculum encourages parents to take smoking outside and away from their children. For more information on this curriculum, please visit: http://fcs.tamu.edu/health/child_health/put_it_outside/put_it_outside.htm.)
- ◆ Encourage children not to use tobacco products.
- ◆ Don’t allow smoking or tobacco products around your children.
- ◆ Choose smoke-free restaurants.
- ◆ Talk to your family about the importance of a smoke-free home.

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Prevent Skin Cancer

There is one last type of cancer I would like to discuss with you today—skin cancer. Skin cancer is the most common form of all cancers. Fortunately, most skin cancers are very slow growing and easy to recognize. They are also relatively easy to treat when detected early. Most importantly, we can help prevent skin cancer by:

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- ✓ wearing sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of 15 or more on all areas of the skin exposed to sunlight.;
- ✓ limiting sun exposure between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.;
- ✓ wearing broad-brimmed hats, wraparound sunglasses, and long-sleeved shirts to protect our skin; and
- ✓ not getting a tan or using sunlamps.

It’s also important for our physicians to check our skin every three years if we are between 20 and 40 years of age. If we are over 40 years old, we should have our skin examined every year.

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Conclusion

So what does all this mean? Do you think you can find a way to exercise 30 minutes or more five or more days of the week? Will you control what you eat and how much? Can you make a smoke-free environment for yourself and the children in your life? Will you use sun protection every day? What will be the hardest for you to attain? Please take a moment and consider your daily habits. Pick one of these tasks we discussed today and make a goal for yourself. Make your goal achievable! Perhaps your goal could be walking after work or cooking one item healthier for your family each week. If you want, tell a friend your goal, and that friend can remind you of it when you’re not wanting to follow through.

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I would like to challenge you to increase your physical activity, make healthier food choices, and make a smoke-free environment. You can do it!

Texas AgriLife Extension Service can help!

Please let me know if you have any questions or would like more information on any of these topics.

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