

Cut your cancer risk



Many people think cancer is something that happens to somebody else, but it is important to understand that cancer can affect anyone.

The good news is, more than one third of cancers can be prevented and some simple lifestyle changes can help you reduce your risk.

Visit www.cutyourcancerrisk.org.au to find out how.

1. Check for unusual changes and have regular screening tests

For most cancers, finding it early means treatment has a better chance of success.

Look out for:

- lumps or sores that don't heal
- coughs or hoarseness that won't go away
- unexplained weight loss
- a mole or skin spot that changes shape, size or colour
- changes in your toilet habits or blood in a bowel motion.

These signs don't necessarily mean you have cancer, but it's important to have them checked out.

Screening is an effective way of finding cancer early and is recommended where there is a proven benefit:

- Women aged 50–69 years are encouraged to have a mammogram for breast cancer every two years (call BreastScreen on 13 20 50 to book an appointment).
- Women aged 18–70 years are encouraged to have a Pap test every two years to detect early changes that, if left untreated, can lead to cervical cancer. Visit www.papscreen.org.au for further information.
- Men and women over 50 are encouraged to do a faecal occult blood test (FOBT) every two years for bowel cancer. Visit www.cancervic.org.au/boweltest or speak to your doctor.

There is currently no test to differentiate between prostate cancers that are slow-growing and unlikely to cause harm and those that are aggressive and require treatment. Because the side effects of prostate cancer testing and treatment are often very serious, we encourage men concerned about prostate cancer to speak to their doctor to make an informed decision about whether testing is right for them.

Visit www.prostatehealth.org.au for more information.

Immunisation: As well as having a regular Pap test, girls and women can help prevent cancer of the cervix by having the cervical cancer vaccine. Speak to your doctor or visit www.papscreen.org.au for more information.

2. Maintain a healthy weight

More than a third of Australia's cancer deaths relate to unhealthy lifestyles including poor eating and exercise habits.

Cancer Council research shows that a waistline of over 100 cm for men and 85 cm for women significantly increases the risk of some types of cancer, including bowel, breast and oesophagus cancers.

Maintaining a healthy weight is about getting the balance right between what you eat and how physically active you are.

Tips:

- Reduce food and drinks high in fats and sugars.
- Limit alcoholic drinks as they are high in calories.
- Choose non-fat or reduced-fat milk and dairy products.
- Choose fish, poultry or vegetarian options instead of red meat for some meals.
- If your weight is increasing you may need to reduce the amount of food you are putting on your plate.

3. Limit alcohol

Even moderate amounts of alcohol increase the risk of cancers of the mouth, pharynx, larynx, oesophagus, liver, breast and bowel. To reduce the risk of cancer, limit your intake of alcohol, or better still, avoid it altogether. For individuals who choose to drink alcohol, Cancer Council recommends they follow the Australian National Health and Medical Research Guidelines to reduce health risks from drinking alcohol and limit their consumption to no more than two standard drinks and have at least one or two alcohol-free days every week.

One standard drink is roughly equal to:

- 285 ml of beer (one pot of beer)
- 100 ml of wine (one small glass of wine)
- 30 ml of spirits (one measure of spirits)

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There is no evidence to suggest alcoholic drinks (such as red wine) protect against any type of cancer.

Tips:

- If you do choose to drink alcoholic drinks, limit to special occasions.
- Drink water rather than alcohol to quench your thirst.
- Dilute alcoholic drinks. For example, try a shandy (beer and lemonade), white wine and mineral water or sprits and low-calorie soft drinks.
- Choose low-alcohol drinks.

4. Eat a healthy diet

Fruit and vegetables are low in fat and calories and help maintain a healthy body weight. Given that being overweight is a risk factor for cancer, they are an important part of our daily diet.

Fruit and vegetables also contain natural protective substances that may destroy cancer-causing agents (carcinogens) and may protect against cancer of the mouth, throat, oesophagus, stomach, bowel and lung.

Research suggests that eating red meat and, in particular, processed meat, may increase the risk of bowel cancer. Cancer Council recommends eating wholegrain breads and cereals as part of a healthy diet and to maintain a healthy body weight.

Tips:

- Aim to eat five serves of vegetables and two serves of fruit each day. A serve size is about a handful.
- Limit red meat intake to three to four serves a week. One serve should roughly fit into the palm of your hand.
- Limit or avoid eating processed meats like sausages, frankfurts, salami, bacon and ham.

5. Be physically active

Regular physical activity has been shown to reduce the risk of bowel and breast cancers. One hour of moderate activity or 30 minutes of vigorous activity is recommended on most days for general health and fitness. Moderate activities include brisk walking, medium-paced swimming or cycling. Vigorous activities include active sports like football, squash, netball and basketball and activities such as aerobics, circuit training, jogging and fast cycling.

Tips:

- Be active in as many ways as you can. See physical activity as an opportunity, not an inconvenience.

- Walk instead of drive to the shops and walk in your lunch breaks.
- Walk or cycle to work and walk up stairs instead of taking the lift or escalator.
- Do something you enjoy or can do with a friend, like tennis, swimming or dancing.
- If you have a sedentary job, take regular activity breaks and move as much as possible throughout the day.

6. Be SunSmart

It is important to balance the risk of skin cancer with maintaining adequate vitamin D levels. In Victoria from **September to April** average ultraviolet (UV) levels are generally 3 and above and this is when sun protection is required.

For most Victorians only a few minutes of sun exposure each day is needed to get enough vitamin D (outside peak UV hours 10 am – 3 pm).

To protect yourself:

1. Slip on sun-protective clothing.
2. Slop on SPF30+ broad spectrum water resistant sunscreen 20 minutes before you go outdoors and every two hours afterwards.
3. Slap on a hat that protects your face, head, neck and ears.
4. Seek shade.
5. Slide on sunglasses – make sure they meet the Australian standard.

From **May to August** most people need two to three hours of sun exposure spread across the week for vitamin D. Sun protection generally isn't required unless you are in alpine regions, outside for extended periods or near highly reflective surfaces such as snow.

People with naturally very dark skin need three to six times the recommended exposure levels in each time period.

Tips:

- Look for the SunSmart UV Alert at www.sunsmart.com.au or on the weather page of your daily newspaper.
- Check your skin regularly, at least every three months, to detect any skin changes.
- See your doctor if you have a sore that doesn't heal, a mole that has suddenly appeared or started to bleed or one that has changed its size, thickness, shape or colour.
- Some people are more at risk of low vitamin D. Talk to your doctor if you are concerned about your vitamin D levels.
- Visit www.sunsmart.com.au for more information.

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7. Quit smoking

It is never too late to quit smoking, and the sooner you quit, the more you cut your risk of cancer.

It is also important to avoid secondhand tobacco smoke. Even if you don't smoke, breathing in other people's cigarette smoke can increase your risk of cancer. The good news is that by law, all Victorian bars and clubs are now smokefree, as well as the indoor areas of restaurants and workplaces.

About one in five deaths from cancer are due to smoking. Smoking causes cancer of the lung, larynx, throat, mouth, nose, ovary, bowel, ureter, bladder, liver, kidney, oesophagus, pancreas, tongue, cervix, bone marrow (myeloid leukaemia) and stomach. More than 10,000 Australians are diagnosed with a smoking-related cancer every year.

Tips:

- Call the Quitline on 13 7848 and ask to speak to an advisor. A trained Quitline advisor can help you with practical and expert advice or ask for a free Quit pack.
- Visit www.quit.org.au for advice and information on quitting. You can also use the Quit Coach, an Internet coach that can advise you based on your own situation.
- Quitting is different for everyone, but many people find that advice from a trained advisor and using quitting medications can be useful. Practice saying 'thanks, but I don't smoke' in case you're offered a cigarette.
- Think of yourself as a non-smoker.