

# WCRF UK Recommendations for Cancer Prevention How do they apply to children?

In November 2007 WCRF launched The Second Expert Report – *Food, Nutrition, Physical Activity, and the Prevention of Cancer: a Global Perspective*.

A Panel of 21 international experts, who assessed the evidence of nearly 7,000 leading research studies from all over the world, developed Recommendations on how members of the public can reduce their risk of cancer. Although these Recommendations are aimed at adults, they include habits that, if adopted in childhood, may result in healthy lifestyle choices that could last a lifetime, and may decrease a child's risk of a range of cancers in adulthood.



## Recommendations



### 1 Be as lean as possible without becoming underweight

Maintaining a healthy weight is one of the most important things you can do to reduce your risk of cancer. WCRF UK recommends that adults aim to be at the lower end of the healthy Body Mass Index (BMI) range. A healthy BMI for adults is between 18.5 and 24.9 and is calculated by dividing weight in kilograms by height in metres squared ( $\text{kg}/\text{m}^2$ ).

Children who are overweight are likely to remain overweight as adults or to become obese, and overweight families can be an influencing factor. The amount of body fat changes with age and differs between boys and girls, so the healthy BMI range for adults does not apply to children. Following this set of Recommendations should help your child maintain a healthy weight. If you are concerned about your child's weight, your GP (or other healthcare provider) can advise you on what a healthy BMI is for your child.

### 2 Be physically active for at least 30 minutes every day

As well as helping us to avoid weight gain, research shows that physical activity itself, in any form, can help to prevent cancer. Being moderately active for at least 30 minutes a day is a great starting point for adults and can be achieved by building more activity, like brisk walking, into our everyday lives. However, for maximum health benefits, scientists recommend that adults aim for 60 minutes or more of moderate activity every day, or 30 minutes or more of vigorous activity.

It is important that children are encouraged to lead active lifestyles at a young age. Inactive children are likely to become inactive adults. The government recommendation for children is that they achieve a total of at least 60 minutes of moderate-intensity physical activity each day. This can be in short bursts and spread over the day.



### 3 Avoid sugary drinks. Limit consumption of energy-dense foods (particularly processed foods high in added sugar, or low in fibre, or high in fat)

Choosing healthy foods and drinks instead of those that are high in fat, sugar and calories (energy dense) can help us avoid overweight and obesity and reduce our risk of cancer. It's worth noting that some energy-dense foods such as nuts, seeds and some vegetable oils are important sources of nutrients, and have not been linked with weight gain when eaten as part of a typical diet.

It can be difficult to control how much energy your child is consuming, especially if they eat a lot of energy-dense foods; just a small amount contains a lot of calories. It's OK for children to eat energy-dense foods sometimes, or in small quantities, especially if they are very active and burn a lot of energy throughout the day, but try not to make these the basis of their diet. Sugary drinks are best avoided altogether as they are easy to drink in large quantities but don't make us feel full, even though they are high in calories.





#### **4 Eat more of a variety of vegetables, fruits, wholegrains, and pulses such as beans**

For good health, WCRF UK recommends that we base all of our meals on plant foods, which contain fibre and other nutrients that can help reduce our risk of cancer. When preparing a meal, aim to fill at least two thirds of your plate with plant foods like vegetables, rice, pasta, lentils and cereals, and opt for wholegrain options whenever possible. If a child develops an enjoyment of these foods at a young age, not only will they benefit nutritionally, but they will also find it easier to include these foods in their diet later on in life.

#### **5 Limit consumption of red meats (such as beef, pork and lamb) and avoid processed meats**

To reduce your cancer risk, eat no more than 500g of cooked red meat (700-750g of raw meat) per week.

This quantity is for adults. Young children have smaller stomachs and lower energy requirements than adults so red meat consumption should be lower. The term 'processed meat' refers to meats preserved by smoking, curing or salting, or by the addition of preservatives, and includes ham, bacon, salami, hot dogs and some sausages. Although these might be easy packed lunch options, processed meats should be avoided almost always so it's better to choose alternatives such as lean meats, egg, low-fat cheese or houmous.



#### **6 If consumed at all, limit alcoholic drinks to 2 for men and 1 for women a day**

For cancer prevention, we recommend not to drink alcohol. However, our Expert Report recognises that modest amounts of alcohol may have a protective effect against coronary heart disease. As a rough guide, one drink is the same as: half a pint of normal strength (3-5% ABV) beer, lager or cider; one 25ml measure of spirits (40% ABV) such as vodka or whisky; or one small 125ml glass of wine (12-13% ABV). Obviously, children are not recommended to consume any alcohol.



#### **7 Limit consumption of salty foods and foods processed with salt (sodium)**

Consuming too much salt can be harmful to our health, increasing our risk of stomach cancer as well as high blood pressure. Our daily intake of salt should be less than 6g (2.4g sodium) – we actually need much less than this.

The Food Standards Agency recommends that for children, the daily intake of salt should be no more than 2g a day for ages 1 to 3 years, no more than 3g a day for 4 to 6 years and no more than 5g a day for 7 to 10 years of age. Some food labels list the sodium content (instead of salt), so to find out the salt content, just multiply sodium by 2.5.



#### **8 Don't use supplements to protect against cancer**

The benefits of eating a balanced diet cannot be replaced by taking supplements. There are some situations when you or your child can benefit from supplementation – your GP (or other healthcare provider) can advise you on this. **By eating a balanced diet, you and your child will benefit from a range of nutrients that may help to reduce your risk of cancer.**

### Special Population Recommendations

#### **9 It is best for mothers to breastfeed exclusively for up to 6 months and then add other liquids and foods**

Your midwife (or other healthcare provider) will be able to offer advice and support on this. Evidence shows that breastfeeding can help protect mothers from breast cancer and babies from excess weight gain. Research shows that babies who are breastfed are less likely to consume too many calories than babies who are fed infant formula, so they are less likely to become overweight or obese as they grow up.



#### **10 After treatment, cancer survivors should follow the Recommendations for Cancer Prevention**

Cancer survivors are people who are living with a diagnosis of cancer, including those who have recovered from the disease. For cancer survivors, unless advised differently or unable to, the best advice is to follow the WCRF UK Recommendations for diet, healthy weight and physical activity. People who are currently undergoing treatment for cancer are likely to have special nutritional requirements. It's best to ask an appropriately trained health professional for advice.



**WCRF UK also advises against smoking or chewing tobacco in any form.**

*For more details on the Recommendations, to request publications or to make a donation, visit [www.wcrf-uk.org](http://www.wcrf-uk.org) or phone 020 7343 4205.*