Healthy Living

February 2016

Diet, exercise, smoking, and other lifestyle choices you make all impact your overall health and your risk for cancer. To help you stay well, the American Cancer Society offers the Healthy Living Newsletter, a monthly email with useful information on eating right, staying active, and other steps you can take to help reduce your cancer risk. | Español

Why We Screen for Some Cancers and Not Others

Screening tests can be a powerful tool in finding cancer early – and sometimes even preventing it. But they aren’t perfect. Find out what’s behind the guidelines that tell us what screening tests to get and when.

LEARN MORE

How to Get More Sleep

Millions of Americans have trouble falling asleep or staying asleep at night. Follow our tips to help you beat insomnia and get the restful sleep you need.

Squeeze in Exercise at Home

Getting regular physical exercise is important for getting and staying healthy. We’ll show you some simple steps you can take to fit more activity into your day.
Does chocolate have health benefits?

We wish the answer were yes! But it’s actually a bit more complicated than that. Learn what the science tells us about chocolate and whether it’s good for you.

Recipe: White Bean and Spinach Soup

Our **White Bean and Spinach Soup** is high in fiber and loaded with vitamins and minerals. It’s also a delicious way to warm up on a cold winter day.
Healthy Living » Why We Screen for Some Cancers and Not Others

Why We Screen for Some Cancers and Not Others

Screening means having a test that looks for cancer or another disease in people who don't have any symptoms. Some screening tests – such as colonoscopies – can find growths and remove them before they have a chance to turn into cancer. Other screening tests can find cancer early when it's easier to treat.

The benefits of screening tests – finding cancer early or sometimes even preventing it by removing growths before they have a chance to turn into cancer – must be weighed against any risks of the tests themselves. Risks may include anxiety, pain, or other side effects. And screening isn't perfect. Sometimes screening misses cancer, and sometimes it finds something suspicious that turns out to be harmless, but must be checked out through additional tests that also carry risks.

This is why the American Cancer Society uses scientific evidence to create guidelines for cancer screening. The guidelines advise people about what screening tests they should get, when they should get them, and how frequently. The higher a person's risk for cancer – due to age, family history, or other factors – the more likely the benefits of screening will outweigh the risks.

American Cancer Society Screening Guidelines

The Society’s guidelines for average-risk adults recommend regular screening for breast cancer, cervical cancer, and colon cancer, based on scientific evidence that those screenings save lives. Weighing the benefits and risks of screening for prostate cancer and lung cancer is more complicated and must take many factors into consideration. Therefore, the American Cancer Society recommends people become informed and make the decision together with their doctor. For many other cancer types, researchers continue to conduct
studies to learn the best ways to find cancer before symptoms appear.

- **Breast Cancer**: Women should be able to start screening at age 40 if they want to. All women at average risk of breast cancer should begin yearly screening by age 45. At age 55, women can choose to continue with yearly mammograms, or choose to have them every other year. Women should talk to their doctor about their own personal risk for breast cancer and about any breast changes they notice. Regular mammograms should continue for as long as a woman is in good health.

- **Cervical Cancer**: Women between the ages of 21 and 29 should have a Pap test every 3 years. Women between the ages of 30 and 65 should have both a Pap test and an HPV test every 5 years, or a Pap test alone every 3 years. Women over age 65 who have had regular screening tests with normal results should no longer be screened for cervical cancer. Women who are at high risk for cervical cancer may need to be screened more often.

- **Colon Cancer**: Most people should begin regular colon cancer screening at age 50, but those with a family history or other risk factors should talk with their doctor about beginning earlier. Several different tests can be used to screen for colon cancer, including colonoscopy, flexible sigmoidoscopy (FSIG), guaiac-based fecal occult blood test (gFOBT), and more. Discuss which test is right for you with your doctor.

- **Lung Cancer**: People at high risk for lung cancer should discuss low-dose CT scan with their doctor. “High risk” includes current smokers (or those who have quit within the last 15 years) ages 55 to 79 years old who have a smoking history of 30 pack-years or greater. This means smoking an average of 1 pack a day for 30 years, 2 packs a day for 15 years, or the equivalent.

- **Prostate Cancer**: Men should discuss the possible risks and benefits of prostate cancer screening with their doctor before deciding whether to be screened. The discussion should take place starting at age 50 for men who are at average risk of prostate cancer and expect to live at least 10 more years. It should take place at age 45 for men who are at higher risk, including African American men and men who have a father or brother diagnosed with prostate cancer, and at age 40 for men at even higher risk. Talk to your doctor about your history.

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**Recommendations for You**

Learn what screening tests the American Cancer Society recommends for you, based on your age and gender.
How to Get More Sleep

Are you getting enough sleep at night? According to the National Institutes of Health (NIH), about 70 million Americans have sleep problems that keep them awake when they want to sleep, and lead to drowsiness when they want to be alert.

The NIH says adults need 7-8 hours of sleep each night to be well-rested, but that most people get less than that. They recommend these tips for getting a good night’s sleep.

- Go to sleep at the same time each night, get up at the same time each morning, and avoid naps after 3pm.
- Avoid caffeine and alcohol late in the day. Avoid nicotine completely.
- Get regular exercise, but not within 2-3 hours of bedtime.
- Don't eat a heavy meal late in the day, but a light snack before bedtime is OK.
- Make your bedroom comfortable, dark, quiet, and not too warm or cold.
- Follow a routine to help you relax before sleep.
- Don’t lie in bed awake. If you can’t fall asleep after 20 minutes, do something calming until you feel sleepy, like reading or listening to soft music.
- See a doctor if you continue to have trouble sleeping.

Could it be depression?

Sometimes trouble sleeping is just trouble sleeping, but sometimes it’s a sign of clinical depression – a
sadness that doesn't go away or that interferes with your everyday life. One type of depression, seasonal affective disorder (SAD), is more common around this time of year, when the days are shorter and the nights are longer. Treatment for SAD often involves light therapy and can also include talk therapy and prescription medication.

Other kinds of depression may be caused by a tragic event, a period of stress, an illness, changes in the brain that affect mood, or for reasons nobody understands. Getting help is important, because treatment, including medicines, talk therapy, or a combination of both, can reduce the suffering that comes along with depression and improve quality of life.

If you suspect you may be depressed, make an appointment to see a doctor. If you notice symptoms in a friend or family member, talk with them about getting help. If someone tries to hurt themselves, or has a plan to do so, urge them to get help from their doctor or the emergency room, or call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255).
Squeeze in Exercise at Home

We all know exercise is important. Regular physical activity can significantly lower your lifetime risk for cancer and other diseases including heart disease and diabetes.

The American Cancer Society recommends you get at least 150 minutes of moderate intensity or 75 minutes of vigorous intensity activity each week (or a combination of these), preferably spread throughout the week.

However, even small amounts of moderate activity (about the level of a brisk walk) throughout the day can provide benefits.

No gym membership? No problem!

Commuting to and from the gym takes time, and membership can be expensive. If a health club isn’t in your budget and time is short, try these tips for exercising at home.

- Take a walk outside if it’s a nice day, or walk inside around the house if it isn’t. Walk fast enough to speed up your heart rate and break a sweat.
- Walk up and down your stairs. Take every other step to give your legs a good workout.
- Turn on the radio and dance in the house, alone or with a partner.
- Do jumping jacks or jog in place while you’re watching TV. Try to keep moving for at least 10 minutes.
- Do squats when lifting and putting away groceries, or when picking up your children. Bend with your knees and keep your back straight so you don’t hurt yourself.
- Grab an object like a soup can if you’re just starting to exercise, or a jug of water if you’re stronger.
Stay Healthy All Year Long

Receive lifestyle tips each month to stay well and help lower your cancer risk. Sign up for the Healthy Living newsletter now.

Bend at your elbows to curl your hand to shoulder level. Repeat 10 to 12 times, or until you can’t do it anymore.

No matter what kind of activity you choose, the important thing is to get moving. Try to look for opportunities to be active throughout your day.
Healthy Living » Does chocolate have health benefits?

Does chocolate have health benefits?

It’s been reported in the media for years that eating chocolate is heart-healthy, helps prevent cancer, and is a pick-me-up when you’re feeling down. But is that really true?

We do know that *flavanols* in cocoa beans, an ingredient in chocolate, are antioxidants, meaning that they may reduce damage to cells. Damaged cells can lead to cancer development. What we don’t know is to what extent chocolate itself has an effect. There have been a number of studies done on the health benefits of chocolate, but these studies mostly asked people to remember how much chocolate or chocolate products they consumed, then compared it to whether or not they’d had heart problems or cancer. So while the results of these studies are interesting, they really don’t tell us if it’s the chocolate itself making a difference, or if it’s the flavanols, which are also found in other foods.

Regardless, the studies have come back with mixed results. Some report that eating chocolate may lower the risk of certain cancers, while others show no benefit, and still others show that eating chocolate *increases* cancer risk. There is stronger evidence suggesting that eating chocolate may help prevent heart disease. Flavanols have been shown to lower blood pressure and make your heart, veins, and arteries work better.

What does this mean for you and your dessert choices? Try small amounts of high-quality dark chocolate with at least 70% cocoa. It might give your heart some benefit, and it generally has less sugar and saturated fat than milk or other kinds of chocolate.

However, dark chocolate is still candy, and it still has extra calories, sugar, and fat. Eat it sparingly. After all,
we know that being overweight or obese is clearly linked to certain types of cancers, not to mention diabetes, heart disease, and other chronic illnesses. If you want to get more antioxidants, turn to fruits and vegetables, which are full of cancer-fighting antioxidants and phytochemicals.

Can Eating Chocolate Prevent Cancer?

Read our Expert Voices blog to find out what studies can tell us about chocolate’s effects on cancer.
Recipe: White bean and spinach soup

Nothing is more comforting on a cold winter day than a hot bowl of soup. Our recipe for White Bean and Spinach Soup is from the Healthy Eating Cookbook, which you can get in the American Cancer Society bookstore. It calls for spinach and white beans, which are high in fiber and loaded with vitamins and minerals.

Ingredients

- 1 pound dried white beans
- 8 cups water, divided
- 8 cups beef broth, either homemade or canned
- 2 cups fresh carrots, grated
- 1½ cups onion, chopped
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 teaspoon fresh thyme or ½ teaspoon dried thyme
- 3 bay leaves
- ¼ teaspoon pepper
- ⅛ teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 6 cups fresh spinach, torn
- 2 16-ounce cans tomatoes, coarsely chopped
- ½ teaspoon granulated sugar
- ¼ teaspoon salt (omit if using canned broth)
Directions

Soak beans in 4 cups of water overnight in a large saucepan. Drain soaking water and add beef broth and 4 cups of fresh water. Bring to a boil over medium-high heat, then reduce heat. Add carrots, onions, garlic, thyme, bay leaves, and black and cayenne peppers. Bring to a boil, reduce heat, then cover and simmer for 1 hour or until beans are tender. Add spinach, tomatoes with liquid, sugar, and salt. Bring to a boil, reduce heat, and simmer for 5 minutes. Discard bay leaves.

Serves 8.

Per Serving:

240 calories
2 grams of fat