



**Committee for Healthy Ageing  
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Welcome to Issue 28 of our Bulletin, updating you on issues of importance or topical interest relating to nutrition and physical activity of older people. In this issue we have a look at how lifestyle can assist in keeping us cancer-free. This is our last Bulletin for 2016, and the NZ Nutrition Foundation would like to take this opportunity to wish all readers the Compliments of the Festive Season

### **HOW CAN WE REDUCE OUR CANCER RISK?**

As we enter our later years, our chances of getting cancer do increase, and we all know of friends and family who have some form of cancer. It might be a skin cancer that can quite readily be attended by your GP, or it may be something involving more invasive treatment. Treatments aim to control or cure the cancer, but as individuals you can do your bit to reduce the risk of cancer returning if you've already recovered from it, by ensuring you keep active and eat well.

We are more likely to have a cancer diagnosis than younger people. Over 60% of all cancers are diagnosed in people over the age of 65. But so are 60% of cancer survivors! The cancer rate is higher in older people because we have less resistance and longer exposure to carcinogens, and the immune system is not as efficient. We have decreased DNA repair capabilities, and other illnesses can impact as well. However, a cancer diagnosis does not need to be a death sentence, as early detection and treatment regimens improve.

A cancer diagnosis and/or survival is often an incentive for a person to look at diet and lifestyle – and these days with the internet, it can be difficult to pick what is reliable and what is suspect information. Drastic changes to healthy eating plans are not usually required, but some minor adjustments based on the following recommendations may be advised.

If you do not have cancer or are one of the 60% of cancer survivors, these tips should be helpful.

- Stay at a healthy weight, and do not become overweight or obese. Older people tend to be more prone to losing weight without meaning to, and this can put you at risk of other health issues. So monitoring for a healthy stable weight is important. Hop on the scales weekly and keep a record of what you weigh. If you are losing weight, have frequent meals and snacks.

Also include some high energy foods such as milky drinks, protein-filled sandwiches (e.g. egg, cheese, tuna, peanut butter), small muffin or scone, a small handful of nuts.

- Move more. Keep as physically active as possible. Aim for at least 30 minutes of moderate exercise per day, on at least 5 days per week. Build activity into your daily routine, and 10 minute bursts of activity are fine – as long as the aim is 30 minutes in total.
- Cut down on fat and sugar, especially added sugar and fat. It may be important for you to eat between meal snacks, but choose these wisely – steer away from iced cakes and up-sized muffins or scones. Choose a sandwich, fruit, milky drink, plain cracker or cruskit and hummus or cottage cheese or a higher fibre muesli bar that is not coated in chocolate or sweet yoghurt icing!
- Eat more grains, fruit, vegetables and legumes (dried peas, beans, lentils). Use legumes in place of animal protein foods several times a week for lunches or dinners. Include at least five (preferably more) servings of vegetables and fruits. Choose lower sugar, higher fibre cereals, such as porridge, untoasted muesli, Weetbix, sultana bran.
- Eat less red meat and more fish and chicken. Reduce red meat (beef, pork, lamb) to no more than 500 g (cooked) per week. The ideal portion size is about the size and thickness of the palm of your hand. Keep processed meats as a treat, this is bacon, ham, salami, sausages, corned beef – meats that have been cured by salting smoking, curing or salting, or addition of chemical preservatives.
- Be careful with alcohol. Follow the national guidelines on how much to drink safely by drinking no more than:
  - 2 standard drinks a day for women and no more than 10 standard drinks a week
  - 3 standard drinks a day for men and no more than 15 standard drinks a week
  - Try to have some alcohol-free days each week
- Eat less salt – add less to your food, and watch highly salted food such as ham, bacon, corned beef, processed foods – choose low salt options whenever possible.
- Avoid mouldy grains and cereals. Store these foods in a cool dry pantry in containers with tightly fitting lids. Shelf life of these products under these conditions is extensive, but always check, especially if they have been in contact with moisture.
- Don't rely on over-the-counter supplements, unless you have a specific need as determined by your doctor or qualified health professional. You are better to eat a healthy diet than to rely on supplements for cancer-protecting nutrients

- Quality of life is an important indicator for avoiding deterioration and functional limitation in people receiving cancer therapy. Enjoying a fulfilling and stimulating life with family and friends is to be recommended.
- Frail older people who are being treated for cancer are at increased risk of chemotherapy intolerance, post-operative complications and mortality, so keeping up core strength through daily physical activity and a good diet, and maintaining a healthy weight improves outcomes.
- Once a cancer has developed it cannot be cured through diet alone. Many unproven dietary treatments, particularly those that cut out whole food groups, such as meat or dairy, may not provide enough energy (calories or kilojoules), protein, or other essential nutrients. This can cause unwanted weight loss, tiredness, and decrease your immune function. Your recovery and quality of life can improve if you eat a healthy diet.
- The Cancer Society is a great support and resource for people undergoing treatment, so do get in touch with your local branch.
- The World Cancer Research Fund International is a useful resource as well - <http://www.wcrf.org/int/research-we-fund/our-cancer-prevention-recommendations>