

Dietary guidelines to help reduce your risk of cancer

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The growing evidence supporting a link between diet and cancer has led to recommendations that individuals should choose a more plant-based diet of vegetables, fruits and grains while limiting consumption of red meat, especially high-fat meat.

The American Institute for Cancer Research (AICR) and the World Cancer Research Fund issued a report “Food, Nutrition and the Prevention of Cancer: A Global Perspective” in 1997 which concluded 30 to 40 percent of cancers are directly linked to dietary choices.

In addition to recommending increased consumption of fruits, vegetables, legumes and grain-based foods, the report emphasized the importance of maintaining a healthy body weight and keeping physically active.

The American Cancer Society also has recommended limiting consumption of meats, particularly high-fat meats, as they are major contributors of total fat, saturated fat and cholesterol in the diet. According to the cancer society, meats are good sources of high-quality protein and supply important vitamins and minerals, but consumption of meat, especially red meats, has been linked to cancers at several sites, most notably colon and prostate.

Both the AICR report and the American Cancer Society recommend individuals do not drink alcohol, but, if they do, to limit to less than two alcoholic drinks a day for men and one for women.

Fruits, vegetables and whole grains are known to keep the body healthy and less prone to diseases because they are great sources of antioxidants, which repair damage that occurs naturally in cells.

While no diet can guarantee protection against disease, the AICR recommends these guidelines to help individuals reduce their risk of cancer:

- Chose a diet rich in a variety of plant-based foods.
- Eat plenty of vegetables and fruit.
- Maintain a healthy weight and be physically active.

- Drink alcohol only in moderation, if at all.
- Select foods low in fat and salt.
- Prepare and store food safely.
- Do not use tobacco in any form.

To help individuals make the transition to healthier eating, the AICR also suggested a “New American Plate” which emphasizes kinds of food that can significantly reduce the risk of disease along with a change in the proportions of the foods consumed.

The general rule for the New American Plate is vegetables, fruits, whole grains and beans should cover two-third or more of the plate with fish, poultry, meat or low-fat dairy one-third or less. The plate foods should include one or more vegetables or fruits in addition to whole grain products like brown rice, kasha, whole wheat bread or pasta.

The New American Plate concept reverses the traditional American plate with meat as a side dish, rather than the main ingredient. Even small changes from the old to the new plate can provide real health benefits by providing better nutrition while lowering fat and calorie intake.

As important in the new food plate is the size of the servings. Over the last 20 years, the average number of calories Americans eat each day has increased from 1,996 to 2,247. That increase of 251 calories per day is an extra 26 pounds per year.

By substituting plant-based foods for foods rich in fat, individuals will be better able to manage their weight. Eating more fruits, vegetables, whole grains and beans satisfies hunger with fewer calories.

For food and fitness information from the American Cancer Society, visit: http://www.cancer.org/docroot/PED/ped_3.asp

And, for more information on the AICR report and the New American Plate, visit: http://www.aicr.org/site/PageServer?pagename=pub_nap_index_21