

Claims about the health benefits of dietary supplements have made them popular. Many of us take them because we think they will help us to keep healthy. But using dietary supplements as a way of reducing your cancer risk is not recommended. Instead, WCRF UK advises choosing a balanced diet with a variety of foods. This leaflet explains what dietary supplements are and how you can get all the nutrients you need from a healthy diet.

A balanced diet is best

Our expert Panel of scientists advises that, for most people, the best source of nourishment is food and drinks, rather than dietary supplements. This Recommendation appears in the WCRF/AICR 2007 Expert Report. The Expert Report reviewed all of the available evidence on diet, physical activity and weight management in relation to cancer risk and produced 10 Recommendations for Cancer Prevention.



If we all followed these Recommendations, experts estimate that **about a third of the most common cancers could be prevented.**

This leaflet focuses on the dietary supplements Recommendation:

Don't use supplements to protect against cancer

What are supplements?

Dietary supplements contain vitamins, minerals, herbs or plant material. They can be found in pill, capsule, tablet or liquid form and are used to supplement (add to) the diet, but they should not be considered a substitute for food.

Different doses

Supplements are available in a variety of doses (amounts). Lower-dose supplements contain levels of nutrients that can be found in a well-balanced diet. Higher doses may contain nutrients at many times the amount found in a healthy balanced diet.



A nutrient at a high dose may have a different effect on the body compared with a nutrient at a low dose. For example, at a low level a nutrient may be necessary, but at a higher level it could be toxic or otherwise harmful to health. A high dose of one nutrient may also affect how the body absorbs other nutrients.

If you are unsure whether you need to take a dietary supplement, it's best to see your GP.



What is the the link with cancer prevention?

Some evidence shows that certain supplements may reduce the risk of some cancers. However, these supplements have normally been tested on a selected group of people. This means that we do not know how the supplement will affect everyone. There are also studies which show that other high-dose supplements can increase the risk of some cancers.



Some studies have shown that high-dose supplements can upset the balance of nutrients in the body. More research needs to be done, but this is one way in which they might affect our risk of cancer.



At present, it is unclear how taking low-dose dietary supplements will affect your chance of getting cancer. So, until we have more research, the best advice is to choose a healthy diet, where the balance of risks is known, rather than relying on supplements.

What is WCRF UK's advice?

Based on the findings of the Expert Report, WCRF UK advises we should not use supplements to protect against cancer. The expert Panel agreed that the most effective source of nourishment is food and drinks.

The best way to reduce your risk of cancer is to follow a healthy diet.

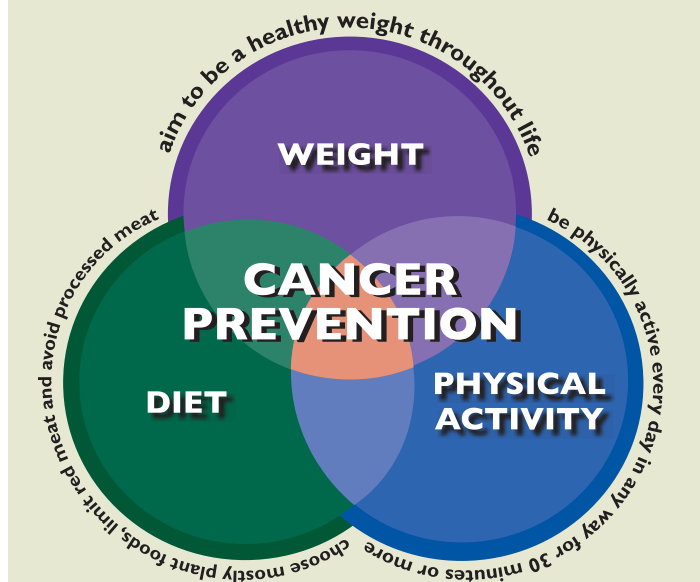


Even multivitamin supplements with a wide range of nutrients will not contain all the beneficial substances found naturally in foods (e.g., fibre), though they will help protect against specific deficiencies.

Choosing a wide variety of vegetables, fruits and other plant-based foods offers better protection against cancer. Consuming nutrients as foods during the course of the day means you can get a range of vitamins, minerals and other supplements at safe levels. What's more, a healthy diet has the added benefit of helping us to maintain a healthy weight.

WCRF UK Guidelines for Cancer Prevention

The choices you make about food, physical activity and weight management can reduce your chances of developing cancer.



- choose mostly plant foods, limit red meat and avoid processed meat
- be physically active every day in any way for 30 minutes or more
- aim to be a healthy weight throughout life

Are supplements sometimes necessary?

Some groups of people may benefit from taking supplements. These are the most common situations when taking a supplement would be beneficial:

- ◆ All women of childbearing age intending to conceive a child should take a 400mcg folic acid supplement before conception and up to the 12th week of pregnancy.
- ◆ Pregnant women and nursing mothers should take a vitamin D supplement and possibly an iron supplement if their iron level is low.
- ◆ Children between six months and five years could benefit from taking drops containing vitamins A, C and D. Children with a good appetite who eat a wide variety of foods may not need them.
- ◆ Frail older people who have low calorie needs may benefit from a low-dose multivitamin supplement.
- ◆ Older people should consider taking a vitamin D supplement, as should: people of Asian origin; people who rarely go outdoors; people who cover up all their skin when outdoors; those who don't eat meat or oily fish.

If you want more advice on any of these situations, it's best to contact your GP.



Top tips for a healthy diet

Choosing a healthy balanced diet is important for reducing our cancer risk. Following these tips will ensure you are consuming a variety of nutrients.

- ◆ Base your meals around plant foods like vegetables, fruits, lentils, beans and wholegrains such as brown rice and wholemeal pasta.
- ◆ Remember your 5 A DAY! Opt for a colourful variety of vegetables and fruits every day.
- ◆ Eat red meat in moderation and avoid processed meats such as bacon and ham.
- ◆ Avoid drinking alcoholic drinks. If consumed at all, then limit drinks to two for men and one for women a day.

For more information and lots of exciting recipes and cookbooks visit us at www.wcrf-uk.org.



Did you know that many cases of cancer could be prevented? For practical information on choosing a healthy diet, managing your weight and becoming more active to help reduce your risk, visit our website:

www.wcrf-uk.org

WCRF UK Recommendations for Cancer Prevention

- 1 Be as lean as possible without becoming underweight
- 2 Be physically active for at least 30 minutes every 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)
- 4 Eat more of a variety of vegetables, fruits, wholegrains, and pulses such as beans
- 5 Limit consumption of red meats (such as beef, pork and lamb) and avoid processed meats
- 6 If consumed at all, limit alcoholic drinks to 2 for men and 1 for women a day
- 7 Limit consumption of salty foods and foods processed with salt (sodium)
- 8 Don't use supplements to protect against 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
- 10 After treatment, cancer survivors should follow the Recommendations for Cancer Prevention

And, always remember – do not smoke or chew tobacco

WCRF UK is part of the WCRF global network

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“Stopping cancer before it starts”

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A CLOSER LOOK AT: Dietary Supplements

