



WCRF UK Health Professionals' Guide to Supporting Cancer Survivors

Starting out

After finishing treatment for cancer, many people will want to know how they can alter their lifestyles to help them recover, increase their energy levels and reduce the risk of the same cancer recurring or a new cancer developing.

This is a time when doctors and health professionals may be asked for advice from patients about diet, physical activity and weight management. This factsheet and the WCRF UK booklet *Eating Well and Being Active Following Cancer Treatment* can help you do just that.

When discussing the options for improving health outcomes with patients, it can be helpful to introduce them to the WCRF UK Recommendations for Cancer Prevention as outlined in this factsheet and, in more detail, in the booklet.

Health professionals can use the information in this factsheet and the booklet to explain how being overweight, inactive or eating a poor diet can impact on the risk of cancer development or recurrence.

It might be helpful to refer patients to the 'Starting Out'

section on page 6 of the booklet, which suggests completion of a food, drink and activity diary. A diary is a good place to start as it can help patients compare their normal eating and activity patterns with the guidelines. It will then be easier for them to identify the areas they feel they most need to tackle.

It is important to start looking at a person's usual eating and activity patterns. We can then tailor the advice so that it is achievable and will help improve their health, how they feel and, while there are no guarantees, reduce the risk of recurrence.



WCRF UK Recommendations for cancer survivors



As part of the 2007 WCRF/AICR Second Expert Report, a Panel of experts reviewed the available evidence on diet and lifestyle in those who had already had a diagnosis of cancer. From this they developed the first international recommendations on diet and activity specifically for cancer survivors. In general, the lifestyle advice for people who have

recovered from cancer is similar to healthy eating and physical activity recommendations for other people. The Expert Panel recognised that the evidence for nutritional interventions in cancer survivors is weak and that more research is needed in this area. The WCRF global network has made this a priority for future research. In the years to come it is hoped that we will learn more about how specific diets and

lifestyle approaches can affect the risk of cancer recurrence or progression or the spread of secondary cancers.

In summary, the Expert Panel recommended that cancer survivors should follow **WCRF UK's Recommendations for Cancer Prevention** (see next page).

The Expert Panel also emphasised that many people who have recovered from cancer are either malnourished or at risk of malnutrition. Those people who have been more severely impacted physically and nutritionally by their disease and their treatments should seek specialist nutrition advice.

WCRF UK's booklet *Eating Well and Being Active Following Cancer Treatment* provides a lot of specific and practical guidance on the individual Recommendations. Here is a summary, along with a few extra practical tips.

WCRF UK's 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 units per day for men and 1 unit per day for women.
 7. Limit consumption of salty foods and foods processed with salt (sodium).
 8. Don't use supplements to protect against cancer.
 9. It is best for mothers to breastfeed exclusively for up to six 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*



Practical advice for cancer survivors

Weight

After not smoking, maintaining a healthy weight is the most important way to reduce cancer risk.

Many people are not aware that obesity is now recognised as a major risk factor for cancer, as well as other chronic diseases such as cardiovascular disease and type 2 diabetes.

Specifically, being a healthy weight reduces the risk of the following cancers:

- Bowel
- Breast (in post-menopausal women)
- Oesophageal (adenocarcinoma)
- Pancreas
- Endometrial
- Kidney

Furthermore, post-menopausal breast cancer patients often gain weight during treatment, which in itself may have an impact on health and could be related to higher rates of breast cancer recurrence and mortality.

Identifying whether a cancer survivor's weight puts them at risk

To help assess whether a person's weight puts them at risk of further health problems, it can be helpful to work out their Body Mass Index or BMI. BMI also helps to identify those patients who are underweight or at risk of malnutrition. If a significant amount of weight loss has occurred during cancer treatment (i.e., more than 10 per cent of the total body weight) then any advice should focus on ensuring a patient's optimal nutritional health. BMI can be worked out by dividing the patient's weight in kilograms by his/her height in metres squared.
BMI = weight / (height x height).

BMI ranges

Less than 18.5	underweight
18.5-24.9	healthy weight
25-29.9	overweight
30 or more	obese

Ways to help your patients manage their weight

If a patient is some way off their ideal weight, then it can be helpful to focus on an initial weight loss goal of 5-10 per cent of their total body weight, as this alone has been shown to be of significant benefit to health.

Instead of putting too much emphasis on weight or dress size, it is best to help people focus on what they can do to eat better, move more and build fitness. It is advisable to start slowly by introducing some changes that they can manage as part of their everyday patterns.



Using the WCRF UK booklet *Eating Well and Being Active Following Cancer Treatment*:

- On page 29 the booklet suggests encouraging people to experiment a little more with foods and cooking. It can be helpful to learn a few simple recipes if a patient has not done much home cooking before. Or why not suggest a healthy shopping list to help show them how to fill the trolley with healthier food options?
- The booklet provides lots of suggestions for adapting recipes, and by following the example of how to adapt a traditional family lamb stew on page 31, you can reassure patients that there is usually no need to give up family favourites.

