

Healthy Living after Cancer Treatment

This handout offers information on healthy living after finishing cancer treatments. Research shows healthy living can help reduce the risk of your cancer coming back or getting new cancer. This includes:

- Eating well
- Being physically active
- Working towards or keeping your best weight

You cannot change other risk factors such as age, gender, or family history.

Eating well

Eating well is an important part of healthy living. Eating more of some foods and less of others can reduce your risk of certain cancers.

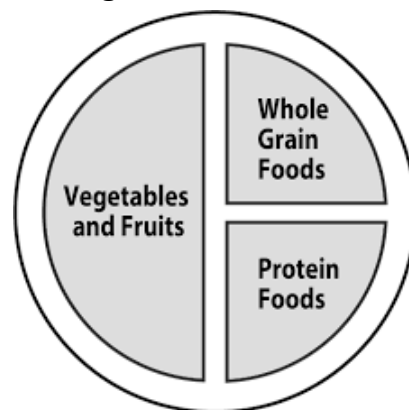
1. Eat mostly plant-based foods

Plant foods have vitamins, minerals, fibre, antioxidants, and phytonutrients (phyto = plant) and may lower your risk of cancer. Plant-based foods include:

- Vegetables
- Fruit
- Whole-grains
- Legumes (beans)
- Nuts and seeds

2. Use the plate from Canada's Food Guide as a guide to include vegetables, fruit, whole grains, and protein in your meals

- Fill $\frac{1}{2}$ of your plate with vegetables and fruits.
- Fill $\frac{1}{4}$ of your plate with whole grains. Examples of whole grains are oats, barley, whole wheat, quinoa, and rice (brown, red, purple, or black).
- Fill $\frac{1}{4}$ of your plate with protein foods. Examples of protein foods are fish, poultry, meat, tofu, legumes (soybeans, beans, lentils, and chickpeas), eggs, and dairy products.



You can find a copy of Canada's Food Guide at food-guide.canada.ca.

3. Eat a rainbow of vegetables and fruits

Brightly coloured vegetables and fruits are high in phytonutrients. Eat a variety of red, green, yellow, white, purple, and orange vegetables and fruits.

4. Eat less red and processed meats

Eating high amounts of red meat or processed meat can increase your risk of certain cancers.

- Limit your intake of cooked red meat to 500 grams (about 2 ¼ cups or 18 ounces) each week. Red meat includes beef, veal, pork, and lamb.
- Eat less processed meats or eat them on special occasions only. Processed meat includes ham, bacon, deli meat, hot dogs, and sausages.

5. Eat less foods and drinks high in fat, salt and sugar

Too many calories can lead to weight gain. A high body weight may increase your risk for cancer.

- Sugar-sweetened beverages are high in sugar and calories and can cause weight gain. This includes pop, iced tea, fruit cocktails, sports and energy drinks, vitamin-enhanced waters, milkshakes, sweetened coconut water, iced cappuccino, and flavoured coffee/tea beverages.
- Eat less fats from baked goods, convenience foods, meats, and butter. Unsaturated fats are important to keep your heart healthy. These fats are found in vegetable oils, avocados, peanuts, nuts, salmon, trout, and mackerel.
- Too much salt may be a risk factor for cancer. Most of the salt we eat comes from processed foods such as baked goods, convenience foods, processed meats, and salty snacks.

You can find a Nutrition Facts Table on the Health Canada website at canada.ca/en/services/health/food-labels.

6. Alcohol – less is better

To reduce your risk of cancer, it is better to not drink alcohol at all. If you choose to drink alcohol, keep your risk as low as possible by having no more than 2 drinks of alcohol a week. The less alcohol you drink, the more you reduce your cancer risk.

One drink is equal to:

- 341 ml (12 ounce) bottle of 5% beer, cider or cooler
- 142 ml (5 ounce) glass of 12% wine
- 43 ml (1 ½ ounce) shot of 40% spirits

7. Do not rely on supplements

Dietary supplements include vitamins, minerals, and natural health products. There is little research to support taking supplements to prevent cancer. In some cases, supplements can be harmful.

Most people get enough nutrients from eating a variety of foods. Some people may benefit from a vitamin or mineral supplement. Talk to a member of your healthcare team if you are taking a dietary supplement or plan to start one.

Ask to talk to a registered dietitian in the cancer centre if side effects from cancer treatment or other health problems prevent you from eating well.

Physical activity

Low levels of physical activity may increase your risk of some cancers. People of all body weights can benefit from physical activity. Physical activity has many health benefits, even without weight loss.

Be physically active for at least 20 to 30 minutes each day if possible. You can do this by completing 10 minutes of activity at a time. The Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines from the Canadian Society of Exercise Professionals is available at csepguidelines.ca.

Working towards or keeping your best body weight

Having a high or low body weight can increase your risk of health problems. A high body weight can increase your risk of some cancers. Working towards or keeping your best body weight can improve your overall health and well-being. This can also reduce your risk of cancer.

What you can do to work towards or keep your best body weight:

1. Make small changes

You can improve your health with even small changes to your eating and physical activity habits. The “setting your goals” section of this handout offers information on how to make small changes.

2. Include different types of physical activity

Some physical activities increase your heart rate (aerobic activity) and others make your muscles stronger (resistance activity). Including different types of physical activity can help improve your overall fitness and preserve your muscle strength.

3. Be aware of your eating habits

Take your time eating. Eat in a quiet place. This can help you be aware of when you feel hungry and when you feel full. Keeping track of what, where, and when you eat and drink in a journal (paper or electronic) can help you make changes to your eating habits.

4. Be aware of portion sizes

It can be difficult to know how big or small a serving size should be. This can cause you to eat too much of some foods and not enough of others. It may be helpful to use tools to measure your portions such as measuring cups or your hand.

You can find a handout called “Unlock Food’s Handy Guide to Serving Sizes” from Dietitians of Canada at unlockfood.ca. This website offers more information from dietitians on food, nutrition, healthy eating, disease prevention, recipes, and more.

5. Prepare your own meals

Prepare your meals at home more often. This allows you to eat less processed foods. Include a variety of ingredients and use healthy cooking methods.

6. Eat all foods in moderation

Enjoying food is an important part of eating well. Eat foods that are high in fat, sugar, and salt in smaller amounts and less often.

7. Do not follow fad diets (a diet that is popular for a short period of time)

Eating a diet too low in calories or not eating from important food groups can be harmful to your health. This may prevent you from getting nutrients and calories your body needs. You can also lose weight too quickly. These diets can be difficult to follow for a long time.

Setting your goals

Changing habits can be hard. It can help to make “SMART” goals.

SMART goals are:

- **Specific.** There is a specific action for you to take (or there is a specific result from this action).
- **Measurable.** Allows you to see if and how your goal is met.
- **Achievable.** The goal is something you can do.
- **Realistic.** The goal fits into your routine.
- **Time-framed.** There is a start date or other target dates for your goal.

Examples of SMART goals are listed below. You can use these as your goals. You can also make your own goals.

1. I will increase my fibre intake by eating brown rice instead of white rice once this week.
2. I will make my lunch at home 3 days this week.
3. I will drink water instead of pop at dinner every day this week.
4. I will use a new recipe with a leafy green vegetable this week.
5. I will make a meatless meal this Monday.
6. I will snack on fruit and nuts instead of potato chips on weekends.
7. I will walk quickly for 10 minutes 5 times this week.
8. I will replace 30 minutes of television time with 30 minutes of physical activity 2 times this week.
9. I will go for a hike every Sunday.

Information and supports available

Below is a list of websites, cookbooks and smartphone apps you may find helpful.

This list is for your information only. The Central East Regional Cancer Program does not represent or support any organization or individual on this list.

Websites

Website	What this website offers
American Institute for Cancer Research Website: aicr.org/cancer-prevention/healthy-eating	• Information on healthy eating and lifestyle for cancer prevention • Recipes • Articles on nutrition topics related to cancer

Canada's Food Guide by Government of Canada Website: food-guide.canada.ca	• Recommendations for healthy eating habits and food choices • Information on how to use food labels to compare and choose products • Guidelines in multiple languages
Unlock Food by Dietitians of Canada Website: unlockfood.ca	• Articles on nutrition and health topics (examples: weight, digestion, diabetes, heart health, children, seniors, families) • Meal planning tools • Recipes • Information on understanding food portions at home and when eating out
Cookspiration by Dietitians of Canada Website: cookspiration.com	• Weekly menu planning tool with recipes and shopping list
Real Good Eats Website: realgoodeats.ca	• Recipes include allergen friendly, sheet pan, one-pot and under 30 minute recipes
Food & Nutrition Magazine by the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Website: foodandnutrition.org	• Recipes • Articles on nutrition and food trends • Reviews of kitchen tools
Dietetic Directions Website: dieteticdirections.com	• Recipes • Blog posts • Dietitian counselling services for a fee
The First Mess Website: thefirstmess.com	• Plant-based, vegan and gluten-free recipes
Jessica Levinson Website: jessicalevinson.com	• Recipes developed by a dietitian • Menu planning ideas
Nutrition con Sabor Website: nutritionconsabor.com	• Recipes • Blog post • Latin American cuisine
Food Heaven Website: foodheavenmadeeasy.com	• Plant-based recipes • Podcast and YouTube channel • Meal planning program for a fee

Cookbooks

Cookbook	Description
Mindful Glow Cookbook Abby Sharp	- Written by a dietitian - Taste Canada Award winner (2019)
Evergreen kitchen Bri Beaudoin	Vegetarian meals for week night meals
Dinner in one Melissa Clark	Simple and healthy, one pot, one pan, one sheet meals
Fast, easy, cheap vegan Sam Turnbull	Plant-based recipes
Don't worry, Just Cook Bonnie Stern and Anna Rupert	- Easy to follow recipes - Healthy, delicious and timely recipes
Oh She Glows for Dinner Angela Liddon	Vegan, plant-based, mainly gluten-free recipes
Well Seasoned Mary Berg	- Seasonal meals - Weeknights meals and meals for entertaining
Eat a Little Better: Great Flavor, Good Health, Better World Sam Kass	- Written by a former chef - Healthy balanced meals
30 Minute Mediterranean Diet Cookbook Deanna Segrave Daly RD, Serena Ball RD	Quick, delicious, healthy everyday meals
The Bite Me Balance Cookbook Julie Albert and Lisa Gnat	Healthy easy to prepare recipes, along with some treats to balance it out

Smartphone Apps

App	Description
Cookspiration	- Menu planning with recipes and grocery lists - Recipes with nutritional information
Down Dog or Down Dog HIIT	- Yoga exercises with instruction video and voiceover - Customizable sequence, length and difficulty level - Body weight exercises with high intensity training

WAY	• Mindful eating app that helps you find peace in your relationship with food and your body
Cronometer	• Input foods and drinks to calculate daily calories, protein, carbohydrates, fats, fibre, vitamins and minerals • Databases for nutrient information, including commercial foods and restaurants • Can create custom foods and scan barcodes
Foodility	• Food journal to track meals, drinks, medications, exercise and other notes • Option to add photos of meals/snacks • Does not count calories or other nutrition information
Ate Food Diary	• Photo diary of meals with option to type additional notes • Does not count calories or other nutrition information

Nutrition resources in your community

You may find it helpful to talk to a registered dietitian. See the list of organizations offering appointments with a registered dietitian below. There is a fee for some of these appointments.

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Organization name and contact information	What this organization offers
Ontario Health atHome Website: ontariohealthathome.ca Phone: 1-800-263-3877	• Offers individual counseling with a registered dietitian. • You need a referral from your healthcare team. • OHIP covers this service if you are eligible.
Registered Dietitians in Private Practice Website: dietitians.ca/find . Search this website to find a registered dietitian in private practice closest to where you live.	• Offers individual counseling with a registered dietitian. • You need to pay a fee for this service. Your private insurance may cover it. • You do not need a referral from a doctor. Your private insurance may require you to have a referral for this.

Community Advantage Rehabilitation Website: car-rehab.com Phone: 905-666-2540	• Offers individual counseling with a registered dietitian. • You need to pay a fee for this service.
Lakeridge Health Ajax Pickering – Outpatient Registered Dietitian Counseling Phone: 905-683-2320 extension 15506	• Offers individual counseling with a registered dietitian. • You need a referral from a doctor. • OHIP covers this service.

Ask to talk to a registered dietitian at the cancer centre if you have any questions about the information in this handout.

This handout was created by the Patient Education Program at the Durham Regional Cancer Centre/Lakeridge Health. It was last reviewed in August of 2025.