

reduce the risk

CANCER RESEARCH UK



Background information for teachers

Experts think that around a third of all cancer cases are linked to diet, obesity and alcohol. Diet affects our risk of many cancers predominantly those of the digestive tract, including cancer of the bowel, stomach, mouth and oesophagus (food pipe). Our diet is a complex mixture of foods. We don't yet know for sure which components of our diet are important in decreasing or increasing our risk of cancer. But we can recommend a balanced diet that is rich in fruit, vegetables and fibre and low in fat, red meat and processed meat.

A balanced diet is one that gives appropriate amounts of energy and nutrients to promote good health. Carbohydrates provide energy, fibre helps the intestines to work, proteins aid growth and fats provide energy for metabolism. A balanced diet should include foods from all of these groups and water.

Examples of foods that fit into these groups are:

- Carbohydrates (e.g. pasta, potatoes)
- Proteins (e.g. meat, fish, nuts, eggs)
- Fibre (e.g. bran, broccoli, sweetcorn)
- Fats (e.g. milk, butter, nuts, crisps).

Within a balanced diet no more than 30% of the total calorie intake should be from fats. Some fats though are needed in a balanced diet. These include omega 3 and 6 oils found in nuts, seeds and oily fish.

Many foods fit into more than one group. Cheese, for example, is both protein and fat. Another good way to group foods is:

- Bread, other cereals, pasta and potatoes
- Vegetables and fruits
- Dairy foods
- Meat, fish and vegetarian equivalents
- Fats and foods containing sugar.

It is recommended that people eat at least five portions of fruit/vegetables each day. Eating fruit and vegetables of different colours will provide a range of nutrients. Trying a wide variety of fruit and vegetables at an early age can help to establish a healthy diet for the future.

Being overweight or obese increases the risk of developing several cancers. This risk can be reduced by reaching or maintaining a healthy body weight and by taking exercise. In fact exercise in itself can help reduce the risk of some cancers. Just 30 minutes of moderate exercise such as swimming or brisk walking five days a week can help to promote good health. Regular exercise also increases the efficiency of the heart and helps to keep the muscles firm.

Exercise	Strength	Stamina	Suppleness
Cycling	■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■	■
Football	■ ■	■ ■	■ ■
Gymnastics	■ ■	■	■ ■ ■ ■
Jogging	■	■ ■ ■ ■	■
Swimming	■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■	■ ■ ■ ■

Further information on healthy eating and the connection between diet and cancer can be found at www.cancer.org.uk/health

WHAT IS CANCER?

Cancer is a disease where cells grow out of control and invade, erode and destroy normal tissue. The driving forces behind the development of cancer are damaged genes. The gene damage is often caused by environmental factors like smoking. There are over 200 different types of cancer that can occur anywhere in the body. They all have different causes, different symptoms and require different types of treatment. Cancers develop because of a complicated interaction between our genes, our environment and chance. Have a look at our information on reducing your risk of developing cancer. In Britain, the lifetime risk of developing cancer is more than one in three. So it's likely that every family will come into contact with the disease in some way. Different cancers affect people at different ages, but the risk of getting the disease rises significantly as we get older. Around 65 per cent of cancers in this country occur in people over 65.