



December 10, 2007



Eat Smart Newsletter
Volume LXIII

Food, Nutrition, Physical Activity and the Prevention of Cancer: The Second Expert Report

Released November 2007 by the American Institute for Cancer Research and the World Cancer Research Fund

To develop this report, a panel of 21 international experts reviewed 7,000 studies on 17 kinds of cancer and 61 “exposures” (ranging from red meat to breastfeeding). The first report was released in 1997, and according to panel member and Harvard professor Walter Willet, this second report more strongly emphasizes the importance of overweight as a factor in cancer. “It’s never too late to lose weight,” says Dr. Willet, “just a 5 – 10% weight loss can be beneficial. And of course it’s easier to keep weight off than to lose weight. Once you’ve gained weight, it’s harder to take it off.”

As a result of the extensive review of studies, panel experts developed a list of recommendations for the prevention of cancer – many of which are associated with maintaining a healthy weight. Here is the full list of recommendations:

- **Be as lean as possible within the normal range of body weight** (go to [Body Mass Index – measuring your risk](#) to calculate your BMI).
- **Be physically active as part of everyday life** (limit sedentary activities such as watching TV and aim for at least 30 minutes a day of moderate physical activity such as brisk walking; increase to 60 minutes as fitness improves – or 30 minutes of vigorous activity).
- **Avoid sugary drinks & limit consumption of calorie-dense foods** (soda pop and other flavored beverages; fast food and processed foods with added sugars and fats).
- **Eat mostly foods of plant origin** (5 servings of fruits and vegetables – not counting starchy veggies like potatoes; limit refined starchy foods – white bread, white rice; and eat plenty of whole grains and beans).
- **Limit intake of red meat and avoid processed meat** (people who eat red meat should eat less than 18 oz./week with little if any coming from processed meats like ham, bacon or hot dogs).
- **Limit alcoholic drinks** (consumption should be limited to one drink/day for women and two drinks/day for men – *if you choose to drink alcohol at all*).
- **Limit consumption of salt** (try to stay below 2,400 mg/day—and keep in mind that most of the sodium we consume (75%) comes from processed and restaurant foods—only 10-15% is added at the table).
- **Aim to meet nutritional needs through diet alone** (supplements are not recommended for cancer prevention).



“We found that if you don’t smoke, the single most important thing you can do to prevent cancer is to keep your weight under control,” says panel expert Walter Willet.

Two additional recommendations are made for special populations:

- **Aim to breastfeed** infants exclusively up to six months and continue as they start eating food
- **Cancer survivors** should follow the recommendations for diet, healthy weight, and physical activity

And last, but not least, the panel reminds us not to smoke or use chewing tobacco. More on these findings can be found online:

The American Institute for Cancer Research (AICR): www.aicr.org
AICR’s [Recommendations for the Prevention of Cancer](#)
Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI): www.cspinet.org