

# Letter to the Editor: The Pundit Speaks

By Randolph M. Howes, M.D., Ph.D.

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## ***“Certain Diets Can Reduce The Cancer Risk”***

Tragically, the over-all incidence of cancer continues to rise. More than half of all people born in 1960 will develop cancer at some point in their lives. This new estimate replaces the previous figure, which predicted that more than one in three people would develop cancer. Still, many Americans remain unaware of key risk factors for cancer, even though these risk factors can be reduced by making lifestyle changes. This is likely due to the fact that more people are surviving into old age, where cancer is more common. The old adage is that if you live long enough, you will get cancer. A 2015 study, in the *British Journal of Cancer*, reported that the lifetime risk of developing cancer is 53.5% for men and 47.5% for women. Compared with people born in 1930, that is an increase of 15% for men and 11% for women. So, we need to be aware that there are believed to be many ways to help prevent cancer. Smoking, inactivity, consumption of alcohol, diets high in red meat, diets low in vegetables and fruits, and consumption of processed meats are thought to increase one’s chances of developing cancer. Being physically active, staying a healthy weight, and eating a plant-based diet has the potential to prevent hundreds of thousands of cancer cases each year. A new study claims that a specific cancer-prevention diet that emphasizes more vegetables and physical activity, and less red meat and alcohol, reduced overall cancer risk as well as the risk for several types of cancer. The cancer-prevention diet, advocated by the World Cancer Research Fund/American Institute for Cancer Research (WCRF/AICR), recommends plant-based, high-fiber foods that include whole grains, vegetables, fruit, and legumes. The recommendations also encourage physical activity and discourage fast foods, red and processed meats, sugar-sweetened drinks, and alcohol. Experts said, “This emphasizes the role of an overall healthy lifestyle—nutrition and physical activity and alcohol avoidance—in cancer prevention.” Thus, it is important to keep in mind that every lifestyle factor counts, and it is never too late to adopt a healthy lifestyle. There is now strong, convincing evidence that alcohol consumption increases the risks of oropharyngeal, esophagus, liver, colorectal, and postmenopausal breast cancers. Alcohol intake may be linked to stomach and premenopausal breast cancers, as well. Among all risk factors for cancer (besides tobacco), nutrition and physical activity are modifiable lifestyle factors which can contribute to cancer risk.

In the America that I love, we must educate and make ourselves aware of ways to prevent cancer. Openly discuss any signs or symptoms of cancer with your doctor. Stay active, stay trim, no smoking, cut back on the alcohol and eat healthy. Please, get serious about your health.

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