

APRIL 2009

This issue ▶ Sports Injury Risk ▶ Stress Control ▶ Avoid Aggressive Drivers ▶ Boost Your Veggie Quota

## 3 BEST STEPS to Cancer Prevention

By Elizabeth Smoots, MD, FAAFP

If you could do only 3 things to prevent cancer, what should they be? To find out, the American Institute of Cancer Research (AICR) assembled 9 teams of scientists and 21 top experts to analyze 7,000 studies in a 5-year project.

From AICR's landmark report, here are the top 3 recommendations for preventing cancer.

### STEP 1

**Strive for a healthy weight throughout life.** Strong evidence links excess body fat to some cancers. The risk for cancer of the colon, kidney, pancreas, esophagus, uterus, and breast increases with even small amounts of excess body fat, especially fat at the waist.

Scientists have found that abdominal fat increases levels of insulin, a hormone known to promote cancer. Excess fat may also produce higher levels of growth factors that stimulate cancer cells to grow and divide.

**MORE INFO ▶**  
American Institute of Cancer  
Research: [www.aicr.org](http://www.aicr.org)



### STEP 2

**Choose mostly plant foods; limit red and processed meats.** A plant-based diet contains many compounds your body can use to prevent or repair cell damage.

Whole foods are a much better source of protective nutrients than are supplements. Eat a variety of vegetables, fruits, whole grains and beans.

The AICR report calls for limiting sugary beverages, processed foods high in sugar or fat, salty foods, and red or processed meats. If alcohol is consumed at all, the recommended maximum is 1-2 drinks a day with a weekly maximum of 14 for men and 9 for women.

### STEP 3

**Get extra physical activity for 30 minutes or more every day.** Staying active helps reduce cancer risk by lowering hormone levels. Plus, regular exercise helps you avoid gaining excess weight (See Step 1).

### HEALTH notes

■ **As the long cold days of winter come to an end,** think SPRING and look for vegetables that are at their flavourful best during April and May. Look out for asparagus, radishes, rhubarb, spinach, avocados, artichokes, watercress, and scallions. Use what's in season for your next meal or gathering.

■ **Does sunscreen block your body's absorption of vitamin D from the sun's ultraviolet rays?** Yes. Worn correctly, sunscreen can reduce D absorption by as much as 90%, according to the Harvard School of Public Health. However, sunscreen does not begin screening immediately after you apply it. If you apply sunscreen right before venturing out, you can get enough sun exposure to make vitamin D. To make vitamin D: Limit sun exposure to 10-15 minutes twice a week to face, arms, legs or back. **Note:** People who live north of the line connecting Philadelphia to San Francisco can't make vitamin D in the winter because the sun's rays are not at the proper angle. Talk to your provider about a supplement if you live in northern latitudes or are sensitive to sunlight.

■ **Travel tips to keep you on course with your fitness goals:** Whether packing for business or pleasure, take your **walking shoes**. And how about tossing in some elastic **exercise bands**? They're low cost, portable, quiet and easy to use anywhere; you can get a full-body workout simply by working your muscles as you move and pull against the elastic resistance. Choose bands made of high-quality clamp and surgical tubing.

### APRIL GOAL:

Best exercise for overall fitness is aerobic nonstop activity. Start with 10-minute machine workouts 3-4 days a week; increase time and intensity by 10% a week.

## Normal Weight Obesity: Beyond BMI

Identifying *normal weight obesity* is a new tool in the battle against bulging waistlines – Mayo Clinic researchers (U.S.) use the term to describe people with a normal Body Mass Index (BMI) who have a high amount of body fat. If that seems odd, the researchers point out that obesity is generally defined as excess fat, not excess weight.

A recent Mayo study involved measuring the body composition (fat to muscle ratio) of 2,127 men and women; more than half of them had normal weight obesity. Normal weight obesity participants with the highest body fat percentages were at greater risk for metabolic problems, including hypertension, high triglycerides, abnormal cholesterol and insulin resistance – all factors in heart disease.

The research, published last year, challenges the notion that a normal BMI (18.5-24.9) always protects against developing metabolic conditions, type 2 diabetes and heart ailments. But determining a person's body fat percentage or measuring the waist to determine abdominal fat (a risk factor for type 2 diabetes and heart trouble) may better predict heart disease risk than the traditional BMI. BMI measures weight only in relation to height, and cannot determine the ratio of fat to muscle or location of fat in the body.

## Unsporting Behaviour

### Are you at risk for a sports injury?

With warm weather approaching, get ready to leap into motion – but easy does it! Sports injuries peak each spring when people start doing too much too soon.

Many of these injuries are avoidable. So you can continue to enjoy outdoor pursuits in the months ahead, exercise these precautions when starting a new sport or activity.

**Adapt to new moves gradually.** Increase the time and intensity of your physical activities no more than 10% per week.

**Always warm up.** Ease into your sport or exercise session with activities that raise your body temperature a bit to allow your muscles and heart to adapt to the added demand. Example: Try a short walk or jog followed by sport-specific stretches.

**Cool down.** At the end of your activity, gradually slow your intensity to allow your body to ease back to a normal pace.

**Add strength-building exercises** twice a week to help prevent strain and injuries.

**Suit up.** Invest in appropriate protective gear – for example, helmets for biking, or elbow, wrist and knee pads for skating – and of course proper footwear.



**Take some lessons** or get advice from a trainer or instructor to learn the proper techniques for your sport. It's sure to enhance your enjoyment and may keep you from getting hurt.

### 4-Point Plan to Prevent Pain, Strain or Injury:

- 1 Consult your provider before significantly boosting your activity level.
- 2 Take a break if a movement is painful or just doesn't feel right.
- 3 Seek medical care for these signs – severe pain or swelling; numbness; skin discoloration; loss of function; or inability to bear weight after 24 hours of self care.
- 4 For virtually all of your exercise-related pain the best first aid is to rest and to apply ice as soon as possible.

## Online Medical Advice: Use with care.

More Canadians than ever are surfing websites for health and medical advice. According to Statistics Canada, an average 57% of Canadians ages 16 to 65+ searched for health information online in 2007.

Health websites are available 24/7 and are usually free, making them an appealing and convenient resource. Fortunately, many receive medical review – just take the information with a dose of caution and these steps:

**Choose sites that maintain current content and are regularly evaluated for accuracy by certified medical experts.** *Tip:* The Public Health Agency of Canada ([www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/chn-rcc/index-eng.php](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/chn-rcc/index-eng.php)) and Health Canada ([www.hc-sc.gc.ca/index-eng.php](http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/index-eng.php)) are great places to start.

**Review online advice with your health care provider before you try it.** Studies have shown that people who seek advice online are less likely to



consult their provider. Trouble is, everyone experiences medical conditions differently; this makes your provider the best judge of treatment based on your personal medical history.

**Bottom line:** Responsible websites that provide reliable information will advise you not to use their content as a substitute for your provider's advice. Look for a disclaimer and a list of experts who review their information. One thing no website can ever replace is your provider's care.

# How Well Do You Control Stress? Or does stress control you?

**T**oday's uncertain global economy and other challenges create a heavy burden shared by many people, and the stress and negativity can be contagious.

Without coping skills, chronic stress leaves us vulnerable to mental and physical health problems. **Check the list – how well do you manage stress?**

- YES**  **NO** Do I know how to calm down when I feel upset?
- YES**  **NO** Am I able to avoid staying angry or negative?
- YES**  **NO** Am I able to avoid feeling moody or distracted?
- YES**  **NO** Am I able to recognize what upsets others?
- YES**  **NO** Can I turn to others at work to help me calm down and feel better?
- YES**  **NO** Do I usually feel relaxed and alert when I come home from work?
- YES**  **NO** Can I easily turn to family or friends for a calming influence?
- YES**  **NO** Do I know how to boost my energy when it's low?

If you can answer YES to most of these questions, you're probably doing well to control stress. If you mostly answer NO to these questions, the first step is to recognize that you may have reached a point where stress is now controlling your life.

## Q: Choosing sports shoes?

**A:** Whether you walk, run, bike, hike or play several sports, there's a shoe for you.

Orthopaedic foot and ankle experts recommend a sport-specific shoe for sports you play 3 or more times a week.

When shopping, choose a store that specializes in fitting sports shoes and a sales staff who can judge proper fit; they should confirm size and watch you walk in the shoes. Fashion and colour are nice features, but your priorities are fit and function. Choose support, comfort and construction appropriate to your activities.

The most telling sign of stress overload is your health – how many of these symptoms do you have?

### Mental

- Poor memory and concentration
- Constant worrying
- Lack of interest in normal pleasures
- Feeling overwhelmed or overworked
- Feeling isolated

### Physical

- Using alcohol or drugs to relax
- Eating more or less
- Sleeping more or less
- Nervous habits (nail biting, pacing)
- Frequent headache, stomachaches or colds

Let the exercise above be your first step to feeling less stress.

Life is full of stressful events. However, it is your reaction to situations that can cause stress – so for many people stress is feeling a loss of control.

**Work to control what you can.** For example, you can't control economic fluctuations but you can reduce the financial impact on you by wisely planning and using your resources.

**Learn what you don't know.** To solve a problem, you need to understand what's causing it. Get all the facts.

**Avoid worrying,** which usually creates stress and hinders your ability to cope. Sometimes you can only be patient and believe things will get better.

### More guidelines:

- Get your feet measured. Sizes vary among brands.
- Get fitted late in the day when feet tend to be a little swollen.
- The shoe should fit your larger foot.
- Shoes should conform to the shape of your feet, with roomy toes.

**Tip:** You don't need to "break in" shoes. They should provide comfort and support from the moment you put them on.



## AVOID AGGRESSIVE DRIVERS



**Dangerous driving habits are a serious threat** on the nation's roads – raging tempers, tailgating, racing, weaving, flashing headlights, honking horns. According to AAA, aggressive driving can double your chances of getting into a collision, leading to injuries and even death. What can you do?

### Behave behind the wheel:

- 🚗 Don't block or drive way below speed limits in passing lanes.
- 🚗 Keep your distance from erratic drivers.
- 🚗 Don't fill more than one parking space.
- 🚗 Don't tailgate. It's a major cause of rear-end collisions.
- 🚗 Avoid yelling out the window or stopping on the road to argue.
- 🚗 Don't speed up when someone tries to merge into your lane.
- 🚗 Always buckle up in case of a crash.

### Back off from aggressive drivers:

- 🚗 Give way to bullish drivers rather than fight for space. Why battle?
- 🚗 Don't challenge them by speeding up.
- 🚗 Avoid eye contact with the driver.
- 🚗 Ignore gestures and don't gesture back.
- 🚗 Report unsafe driving to authorities.
- 🚗 If the aggressive driver is involved in a crash, stop safely nearby and act as a witness to the driver's behaviour.

Keeping your cool on the road can be challenging. You can't control how other drivers act, but you can make your drive safer for everyone.

**Keep those questions and suggestions coming!**

phone: 800-871-9525

fax: 205-437-3084

e-mail: editor@personalbest.com

website: www.personalbest.com

Editor: Diane McReynolds

Managing Editor: Susan Cottman

Assistant Editor: Kim Angeles

Medical Editor: Elizabeth Smoots, MD, FAAP

Canadian Advisors: Marica Borovich-Law, MBA;

John Brennan, MD, CCFP; Brooke Tomsett, BC

U.S. Advisors: Cynthia Gale, MS, RD; Timothy J. Halm, MD, ASAM;

Mary P. Hollins, MS, JD; Leslie B. Hutchinson, PhD;

Alice Lockridge, MS; Wm. Richard Ludwig, MD

Designer: Nicolai Petersen

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100 Corporate Parkway, Suite 600, Birmingham, AL 35242

phone: 800-871-9525 fax: 205-437-3084

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# Boost Your Family's Veggie Quota

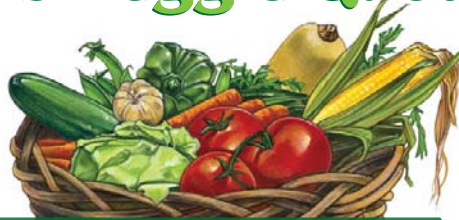
**E**ating vegetables regularly is essential to good health and longevity. Vegetables are packed with vitamins, minerals, fibre and countless chemicals known to boost health. But how do you get enough to meet the quota for all that good? Here are lots of ways to get the recommended 7-10 servings (for adults) a day.

**1) Think of vegetables as more than a side dish at dinner.** Add a variety and colour of vegetables at every meal and snack.

- Have your kids help create kabobs for grilling. Cut bite-size pieces of vegetables and skewer with alternating shrimps or chunks of meat or chicken.
- Serve leftover veggies for the next day's breakfast or lunch.
- Layer thinly sliced vegetables on sandwiches. Good picks: cucumber, tomato, mushroom and avocado.
- Try vegetables with dip for an afternoon snack.

**2) Combine extra vegetables with favourite dishes.** A serving of fresh, frozen or canned vegetables is 125ml/½ cup or 100% juice, or 250ml/1 cup leafy raw vegetables or salad.

- Enjoy sautéed vegetables such as peppers, mushrooms, zucchini, asparagus, or onions in scrambled eggs or omelettes.
- Enrich your spaghetti sauce by adding kidney beans and zucchini chunks.
- Make or order your pizza with extra veggies such as artichoke hearts, hot peppers and spinach; many pizza outlets stock extra veggies for this request.
- Cut meat volume in half and double the vegetables when making stews, soups and chili.



Invite your children to join you at the market to pick out the vegetables – use any you like for this recipe. Your kids can help wash and prep the vegetables. They will love eating a dish they helped prepare.

**3) Make salads daily fare.** Eating a large salad can easily give you 3-4 servings of vegetables.

- Start each lunch or dinner with a generous mixed salad – it helps fill you up to curb your appetite for the main course.
- Make salad an entrée by adding hearty leftovers such as cooked meats, beans or rotelli pasta.
- Add surprise ingredients such as nuts, sunflower seeds or dried cranberries.
- Sprinkle a little grated cheese on top.

### Cool Tips

- Make easy, creamy pureed soups with (fresh or cooked) cauliflower, broccoli, sweet potato, or asparagus. Just add chicken broth and herbs.
- Healthiest balance: Fill half your plate with vegetables; use a quarter of the plate for a healthy starch and a quarter for lean meat or fish.
- Keep ready-to-eat fresh vegetables handy, including carrot sticks, cherry tomatoes, sliced bell pepper and olives.
- Save time with market-prepared produce – bagged salad greens, spinach and chopped stir-fry vegetables.

### Recipe of the Month

## Vegetable Pasta Toss

A colourful vegetable dish designed to excite kids of all ages.

- 1 Start with 4 cups/728g cooked tri-colour spiral pasta.
- 2 Pick 2 to 3 cups/364-546g of vegetables such as:
  - 1 cup/71g broccoli florets
  - ½ cup/31g snow peas
  - ½ cup/61g carrots, julienned
  - ½ cup/46g red bell pepper, sliced thin
  - ¼ cup/25g sliced green onions
  - ½ cup/119ml light Italian dressing
  - 2 tbsp/30ml fresh lemon juice

3 Place 1 inch/2.5cm of water in a small saucepan; add broccoli and peas. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat; cover and simmer 2-3 minutes. Rinse in cold water and drain.

4 In a large bowl, combine broccoli and peas with pasta, carrots, bell pepper and onions.

5 Pour dressing and lemon juice over salad and toss to coat. Cover and refrigerate for at least 1 hour.

### Nutrition Facts

Makes 6 servings (about 1 cup/278g each).

Amount Per Serving	Calories	206
	Protein	6.7g
	Fat	3.7g
	Saturated Fat	0g
	Cholesterol	0mg
	Carbohydrate	36g
	Fibre	3.1g
	Sodium	167mg