

YOUNG ADULTS' 8IGHTWAYS® TO BETTER HEALTH AND LOWER RISK OF CANCER

You're in your early adult years, so it can seem a little strange to think about the importance of taking steps to improve your health. That's something your parents need to worry about. Not you.

But what you do now really matters.

The rates of some cancers are growing in younger adults, and pretty much everyone has steps they can take to improve their well-being today and lower their risk of cancer and other serious diseases down the road.

These eight ways are your guide.

Start with one or two, then build from there. Now's the time.

1 Go with a Healthy, Plant-Based Diet — for You and the Planet

Focusing on fruits, vegetables and whole grains — and limiting red and processed meats — helps keep weight in check, lowers the risk of cancer and other diseases, and as a bonus, puts less strain on the environment. For even more benefits, choose water in an eco-friendly bottle over sugary drinks, like soda and energy drinks.

Try this: Go meatless one day a week. Pick a day to have a fun and healthy vegetarian meal with friends. After a month, make it two or three times a week.

2 Move Your Body Every Day — and Stay at a Healthy Weight

Regular physical activity is in the hall of fame of healthy behaviors. It gives you energy and a boost in mood, and helps prevent cancer and other diseases. Combined with a healthy diet, it can also help you avoid weight gain — another hall-of-fame healthy behavior.

Try this: Go on an exercise streak. Get in a workout groove by seeing if you can go a week, or a month, without missing a day.

3 Get Enough Sleep

Friends, work, school and binge-worthy TV shows. Skipping sleep can sometimes seem like the only way to fit everything in. But poor sleep is a major issue that can hurt mental health and quality of life, and make it harder to make healthy choices. So, try to get 7 to 9 hours each night.

Try this: Turn off the screens. Keeping screens out of the bedroom — or putting them in sleep mode — is a great way to get more, and better, sleep.

4 Don't Smoke — or Vape

You know this: smoking is the worst thing you can do for your health. If you smoke, try to quit as soon as possible. If you don't smoke, be sure to stay smoke-free, and that includes not vaping. While vaping may be safer than smoking, it is not safe. It can lead to nicotine addiction and cigarette use — and expose you to toxic chemicals.

Try this: Get help quitting. Talking to a doctor or visiting smokefree.gov can help double your chances of quitting for good.

5 Limit Alcohol - Zero is Best

Regularly drinking even small amounts of alcohol can increase the risk of breast and colon cancer later in life. And binge drinking — having many drinks at one time — has its own dangers: injuries, car crashes, violence and other serious issues. So, not drinking is the best choice. If you do drink, the less the better, and stay in control.

Try this: Have a plan. Make sure you have alcohol-free drink options when you go out with friends, even if it means bringing your own.



Dig into your family history

Ask relatives about important health issues that may run in the family. Share what you find with your provider or a genetic counselor, and if you've had genetic testing, it's important to discuss those results with a professional, as well.

6 Be Sun-Safe — and Don't Indoor-Tan

Melanoma — a deadly type of skin cancer — is on the rise in young adults. Whatever the color of your skin, avoiding indoor tanning and protecting yourself from the sun can lower your risk and help keep your skin looking healthy. When outside: find shade and wear a hat, long-sleeved shirt and pants. And always use sunscreen, re-applying regularly. It's safe to use and provides added protection.

Try this: Stash sunscreen. Stock up and keep sunscreen in arm's reach so you have it when you need it — like, in your backpack, desk, locker and car, and on the kitchen and bathroom counters.

7 Get the HPV Vaccine — and Protect Yourself from Sexually Transmitted Infections

Human papillomavirus (HPV) and other sexually transmitted infections can increase the risk of many cancers. If you haven't been vaccinated against HPV, talk to a healthcare provider. Men and women can get the vaccine into their mid 20s - and sometimes even later. To lower the risk of HPV and other sexually transmitted infections, it's also important to always practice safer sex.

Try this: Ask your parents if you've been vaccinated. You may not remember if you've had the HPV vaccine, so ask your parents about it, or contact your doctor's office.

8 Mind Your Mental Health

It's often not talked about as much as it should be, but depression, anxiety or other mental illness impacts many young adults. This affects quality of life and overall well-being — and also has been linked to unhealthy behaviors that can increase cancer risk. Practicing activities like mindfulness and being physically active can improve mood, but many people also need professional help. So, don't be shy about seeking it out. You're not alone, and treatment can help.

Try this: Share how you're feeling. If you're concerned about how you're feeling, tell someone you trust. They can help you get the care you need.



Don't forget screening

Screening can catch cancer early, when it's more treatable, and even help prevent it in the first place. At age 21, women should begin screening for cervical cancer with a Pap test. Other cancer screenings don't usually start until age 40 or later and include tests for colon cancer, breast cancer, prostate cancer and lung cancer (in those who smoke or used to smoke). If you're at high risk because of family history or genetics, you may need to start some screening tests earlier.

Young adults should also be screened for other diseases and risk factors, including high blood pressure, unhealthy blood cholesterol, overweight, hepatitis B and C, HIV and possibly other sexually transmitted infections.

Talk to a provider about which tests you should have and how often you should have them.

