

Most cancers related to the way we live

Q. Is there any way to reduce the risk of getting cancer?
A. The National Cancer Institute (NCI) thinks there is. They estimate that up to 60 percent of all cancers may be related to the way we live (things we can control) rather than forces beyond our control, such as heredity.



Terry Glibb

NCI recommends focusing on seven areas to reduce potential risk. They are tobacco, diet, alcohol, radiation, occupational exposure, estrogen and viruses.

Cancer risk factors can usually be classified as:
 • **Initiators** — cause cell damage that may start or "initiate" the cancer process. Radiation is an example of an initiator.
 • **Promoters** — advance the cancer process in already damaged cells. Alcohol is a good example of a

TABACCO: It's classified as both an initiator and a promoter. Approximately 30 percent of all cancer deaths can be attributed to tobacco use. The risk of fatal lung cancer is 25 times greater for a smoker than a non-smoker.

The greatest risk from tobacco is cigarette smoking, but other forms, such as chewing tobacco and dipping snuff increase the risk of mouth and throat cancer significantly.

Combining smoking and other risk factors, such as excessive alcohol consumption, substantially increases the risk of cancer.

DIET: Studies have associated the typical American high-fat, low-fiber diet with a greater risk of colon, prostate, gland and breast cancer. Estimates link 35 percent of cancer deaths to diet. Why the association between a poor diet and cancer exists, and how strong the association between the two is, are unclear.

ALCOHOL: Excessive alcohol consumption is associated with liver,

mouth, throat, esophagus and larynx cancers. And, when combined with smoking, the risk is increased greatly.

RADIATION: X-rays and sunlight are two cancer-producing sources of radiation. Prolonged exposure to sunlight accounts for approximately 90 percent of the over 500,000 annually diagnosed cases of non-melanoma skin cancer.

All x-rays should be discussed with the doctor or dentist to ensure that unnecessary x-rays are avoided.

OCCUPATION EXPOSURE: It is estimated that about 4 percent of

cancers are associated with chemicals, dyes, metals, dust and fibers found in the workplace. As many as 2,000 industrial chemicals may pose a cancer risk.

When individuals are exposed to multiple risk factors — such as cigarette smoking and asbestos exposure — the risk factor increases dramatically more than exposure to just one risk factor.

ESTROGEN: The two most frequent uses of natural and synthetic estrogen are in hormone replacement therapy in postmenopausal women and in birth control pills. High doses of estrogen in post-

menopausal women can alleviate menopause symptoms and retard the development of osteoporosis. However, it can increase the risk of endometrial (lining of the uterus) cancer.

Oral contraceptives may actually offer some limited protection against cancer of the ovaries or lining of the uterus. Each case must be individually determined.

The Consumer Mailbag answers your question. Address mail to The Consumer Mailbag, Concern Detroit, One Kennedy Square, 4th Floor, Detroit, 48226.

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