

Reduce Your Cancer Risks

Will I get cancer?

Here are some things you can do to help reduce your risk. Our chances of getting cancer depend on risk factors. Risk factors are facts about you, including how you live, and your personal and family history.

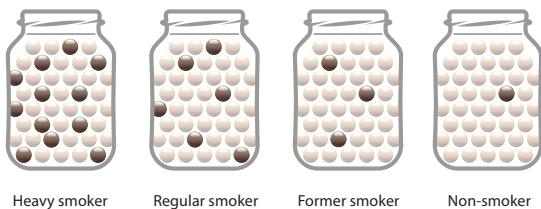
There are risk factors, such as age that you cannot control. Other risk factors, such as whether you smoke or drink alcohol, can be changed.

Risks you can control

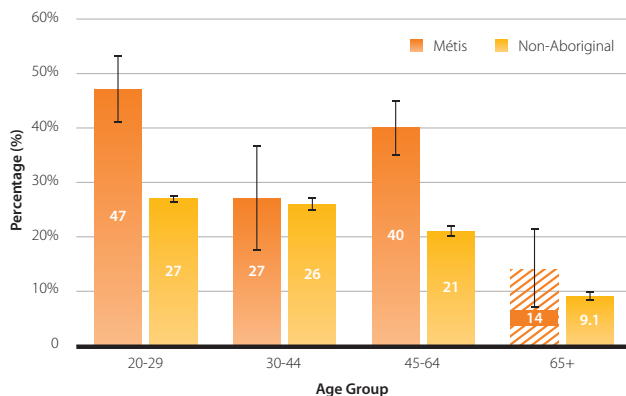
Smoking

Commercial tobacco is the leading cause of cancer deaths in Canada, particularly for lung and bronchial cancer. Smoking and exposure to smoke can also cause urinary tract and colorectal cancers, among others.

- Your cancer risk increases significantly by smoking cigarettes.
- Cancer risk is like the dark marbles in these jars—the more dark marbles, the higher your chance of picking a dark marble (or getting cancer).



Adults currently smoking, by age (Ontario)



Alcohol

Not everyone knows that drinking alcohol increases your chances of getting cancer. In fact, there is no safe amount of alcohol when it comes to cancer risk.



- Alcohol-related cancers include cancers of the breast, colon and rectum, esophagus, liver, mouth and throat.
- If you do drink, keep it to less than 1 drink a day for women and less than 2 drinks a day for men.

Being sedentary and overweight

Being sedentary may increase your cancer risk. Obesity can also increase the risk of several types of cancer.



About 60% of Ontarians are far too sedentary and spend long hours sitting.

Regular exercise in combination with eating healthy foods helps you to maintain a healthy body weight.

It also helps to:

- Balance blood sugar levels.
- Improve digestion.
- Decrease inflammation and colon cancer risk.
- May reduce breast and uterine cancer risk.

👉 Find out more about the cancer risk factors in individual flash cards: cancercareontario.ca/FNIMresources



Eating right

People who have a healthy diet tend to have a healthy body weight.

- A diet high in sweets and sugar contributes to excess weight gain and obesity.
- The more processed meat you eat, the higher your risk of getting colon cancer—avoid canned meat (Spam), wieners, sausages, commercial meat jerky, sandwich/ deli meat and ham.
- Diets very high in salt may cause stomach cancer.
- Eating wild game and fresh fish is a healthy alternative.
- Eating vegetables and fruit may decrease the risk of cancers of the mouth, throat, larynx, esophagus, stomach and lung.
- A diet containing adequate fibre (such as whole grains, fruit and vegetables) can decrease colorectal cancer risk.

Viruses and cancer

Viruses are tiny organisms that invade and take over cells to make you sick. Some viral illnesses increase your risk of getting cancers such as liver or throat.

These viruses are spread through sexual or close personal contact, or sharing drug equipment such as needles or pipes, or personal articles, such as toothbrushes or razors. They can also be passed from women to their babies during pregnancy or at birth.

Vaccines can prevent some virus infections. However, you must get vaccinated **before** exposure to the virus.

- **Human papillomavirus (HPV):** causes genital warts and increases risk of cervical cancer. A vaccine is given at age 11 or 12.
- **Hepatitis B virus:** can cause liver disease and cancer. A vaccine is available for children and adults.

At this time, there are no vaccines for these viruses:

- **Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV):** causes AIDS, which increases cancer risk.
- **Epstein-Barr virus:** causes “mono” or mononucleosis, and is a risk factor for nose/throat cancer.
- **Hepatitis C virus:** increases risk of liver disease and liver cancer.



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BEADWORK STYLE (detail)
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Risks we cannot control

Facts about your personal or family history can also raise or lower your risk of cancer. However, they are not all under our control.

Inheritance

There is increasing evidence that children inherit a higher or lower risk of illness due to their parents' lifestyle. The possibility of our own choices affecting our children and grandchildren is another good reason to live well and be well.

Age

The older you are, the higher your risk of developing cancer. This is simply because of age. When you are young, your body heals easily. This includes repairing or removing damaged cells. As you get older, your body heals more slowly. This includes repairing or removing damaged cells. If not repaired or removed, damaged cells can develop into cancer.

Other illnesses

Having other diseases can increase your risk of cancer. For example, people with type 2 diabetes have a greater chance of getting liver, pancreas, colorectal, uterine, breast or bladder cancer. This might be caused by higher than normal levels of insulin in the blood.

Inflammatory bowel disease can increase the risk of colorectal cancer and cancers of the small intestine.

Women's personal history

- Having children decreases a woman's chance of getting breast, uterine or ovarian cancer, but increases her risk of cervical cancer.
- Breastfeeding decreases the risk of breast cancer.
- Oral contraceptives increase the risk of cervical, liver and breast cancers.
- Using hormone replacement therapy increases the risk of uterine and breast cancer.
- Longer menstruation (earlier start, later menopause) increases the risk of uterine and breast cancer.

👉 Find out how environment and family history affect cancer risk in the fact sheet called *Environment and Heredity*: cancercareontario.ca/FNIMresources