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Pictured right:
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CANCER RISK: NATURE VS. NURTURE

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It is human nature to look for quick fixes that solve health problems and cancer has a lot of quick fix news on the Internet. But with more than 100 related, but separate, diseases that are called cancer, can there be a quick fix? This is a disease with no single cause, and what seems to be an infinite number of unique ways to avoid a 'fix'. Instead of trying to fix cancer once it comes, let's put energy into avoiding or preventing the disease!

Most of us have heard of the BRCA cancer genes that increase a woman's chance of getting breast or ovarian cancer. But it is only an increase in risk; having those genes doesn't mean cancer is a foregone conclusion. Less than 10% of all cancers are directly related to genetics and only 5% of women with breast cancer are carrying a BRCA gene. Many other factors must come into play and that is where we get into nature vs. nurture. Nature (genetics) may have given you a risk, but the choices you make can either increase that risk or nurture your cancer avoidance. There is strong evidence that healthier lifestyles and simple cancer risk reduction choices can prevent one third of all cancers in the United States.

Let's start with healthier lifestyles. Physical activity is paramount to maintaining a healthy weight, good circulation and an efficient metabolism. On the other hand, obesity is directly related to seven different cancers. Recommendations for physical activity start at a brisk walk for 30 minutes five times a week. So find some time for that walk or any exercise. Not only will you be working towards a healthy weight, you will be improving circulation which can flush out toxins and possible carcinogens like free radicals.

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Pictured right: Stay current on the screenings used to detect cancer.



Proper diet is the next best addition to a cancer risk reduction program. It's true: a diet high in red meat is linked to colon cancer. Too much processed meat leads to increased risk of colorectal and stomach cancer. Too much alcohol can lead to liver cancer. The recommendations from the American Cancer Society, the National Cancer Institute, the American Institute of Cancer Research, the World Health Organization and many others are very clear: eat a variety of colorful, fresh whole foods, mostly plant-based proteins and stay away from sugary or processed foods.

Researchers in cancer and nutrition have identified many naturally occurring substances in plant foods with the power to defuse potential carcinogens. Some of these nutrients and natural plant chemicals can neutralize toxins before they can cause cell damage that may lead to cancer. Others can assist the body to make repairs at the cellular level. Still others may help stop cancer cells from reproducing. Even after a cell begins to experience damage that can lead to cancer, what you eat and drink, and how you live can help prevent the cancer process.

As you work to improve the amount of fresh fruits and vegetables in your diet, the question of organic vs non-organic selections may come up. We hope you can choose well but if buying organic is a challenge please consider The Shopper's Guide to Pesticides in Produce™ published by The Environmental Working Group. The guide lists certain foods they call the "dirty dozen plus two" (non-organic fruits and vegetables with the highest amount of pesticides) and the "clean fifteen" (non-organic fruits and vegetables with the least amount of pesticides). The EWG's Guide is available at <http://www.ewg.org/foodnews/summary.php>

Next on the list of cancer risk reduction is to simply avoid carcinogens. Too much exposure to UVA & UVB rays causes skin cancer so wear your sunscreen or cover up. Tobacco products are carcinogens so quit smoking or chewing and avoid second hand smoke. Some viruses cause cancer so consider vaccinations (HPV and HepB).

Finally, stay current on the screenings used to detect cancer. Without exception, cancer is most treatable (and curable) in the early stages. Your Tri-Cities Cancer Center offers multiple free or low cost screenings every year for breast cancer, cervical cancer, skin cancer and lung cancer. We also offer free fecal immunochemical tests for colorectal cancer- just stop in and ask! It's a do-it-yourself kit for those who aren't ready for a colonoscopy. For a quick look at cancer screening guidelines go to:

<https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/dcpc/prevention/screening.html>

For more on the link between diet, physical activity, weight management and cancer we recommend information from the American Institute of Cancer Research (www.aicr.org). There you will find interactive tools to assess what you can do to reduce your cancer risk of occurrence or re-occurrence.

To see if you are at a healthy weight, check your body mass index (BMI). See what your BMI is and other ways to evaluate healthy weight at:

<https://www.cdc.gov/healthyweight/assessing/bmi/index.html>

