

# CANCER RISKS

## AM I AT RISK?

It is often hard to explain why one person develops cancer and another does not. There are risk factors that could increase a person's likelihood of developing cancer, however, some people may have many of these risk factors and never get cancer.



When thinking about your risk of getting cancer, these are some things to keep in mind:

- Not everything causes cancer.
- Cancer is not caused by an injury, such as a bump or bruise.
- Cancer is not contagious. Certain viruses or bacteria may increase the risk of some types of cancer, but no one can “catch” cancer from another person.
- Having one or more risk factors does not mean that you will get cancer. Most people who have risk factors never develop cancer.
- Some people are more sensitive than others to the known risk factors.

### COMMON RISK FACTORS FOR CANCER

#### 1. Growing Older

Most cancers occur in people over the age of 65. The longer you live, the longer you are exposed to multiple risk factors which may come together to cause normal cells to become cancerous. But people of all ages, including children, can get cancer, too.

#### 2. Tobacco

Each year, more than 180,000 Americans die from cancer that is related to tobacco use: smoking, chewing, environmental or secondhand tobacco smoke. Tobacco is linked to cancers of the lung, larynx (voice box), mouth, esophagus, bladder, kidney, throat, stomach, pancreas, cervix and acute myeloid leukemia (cancer that starts in blood cells).

#### 3. Alcohol

More than two drinks each day for many years increases the risk of developing cancers of the mouth, throat, esophagus, larynx, liver, and breast. The risk increases with the amount of alcohol that a person drinks and is higher for a drinker who uses tobacco.

#### 4. Exposure to Chemicals or Ionizing Radiation

Exposure to asbestos, benzene, benzidine, cadmium, nickel, or vinyl chloride in the workplace can cause cancer. Ionizing radiation comes from rays that enter the Earth's atmosphere from space, radioactive fallout, radon gas, x-ray, and other sources. Radon is found in houses in some parts of the country. People who work in mines may be exposed to radon.

## 5. Sunlight or UV (Ultraviolet) Radiation

UV radiation comes from the sun, sunlamps, and tanning booths. It causes early aging of the skin and skin damage that can lead to skin cancer.

## 6. Some Viruses and Bacteria

Viruses like Human papilloma virus (cervical cancer) or Hepatitis B and C (liver cancer) can increase the risk of certain cancers. Investigate vaccines. Bacteria like *Helicobacter pylori*, which causes ulcers, can also increase the risk of stomach cancer.

## 7. Family History

Although it is uncommon for cancers to run in families, certain types of cancers do occur in some families more often, such as melanoma, and cancers of the breast, ovary, prostate, and colon.

## 8. Poor Diet, Lack of Physical Activity, or Being Overweight

A diet that is high in fat increases the risk for cancers of the colon, uterus, and prostate. Lack of physical activity and being overweight are risk factors for cancers of the breast, colon, esophagus, kidney and uterus.

## Do whatever you can to reduce the risks where possible.

- **Avoid tobacco**
- **Reduce exposure to the sun**
  - Wear sunscreen (SPF 15 or greater)
  - Wear long sleeves, long pants, a hat with a brim and sunglasses that absorb UV
- **Reduce alcohol consumption**
  - Drink in moderation (no more than one drink per day for women, two per day for men)
- **Eat a healthy diet**
  - Choose a diet rich in fruits, vegetables and grains, including whole-grain breads and cereals. Strive for five to nine servings of fruits and vegetables every day.
  - Limit high fat foods such as butter, whole milk, fried foods and red meat.
- **Get regular exercise**
  - Increase moderate physical activity, such as brisk walking, for at least 30 minutes on five or more days each week.
- **Keep your weight in a healthy range**
- **Use protective clothing or equipment if you work in an environment that puts you in contact with harmful chemicals or radiation**
- **Get your preventive exams**

- Call Blues On Call Health Coach at **1.888.BLUE.428**
- Go to [www.highmarkblueshield.com](http://www.highmarkblueshield.com) and log on to your Member website to engage in Online Programs.
- Log in to your Member website and select the “Your Coverage” tab to start accessing your member discounts.