

Answers to Your Prevention Questions

by the American Institute for Cancer Research

Q: Does a lot of breast cancer come from environmental pollution?

A: Studies sponsored by the National Cancer Institute conclude that some pesticide chemicals which people worry about pose little or no breast cancer risk. Another class of pollutants – polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbon chemicals (PAHs) – is a modest concern. To reduce exposure to PAHs: Don't smoke; try to avoid secondhand smoke; limit your consumption of grilled and smoked meat, poultry and seafood; and avoid black char on these foods. To bolster your body's defenses against all carcinogenic substances, consume plenty of protective phytochemicals found in the mostly plant-based diet recommended by the American Institute for Cancer Research (AICR). Maintaining a healthy weight, keeping physically active and limiting alcohol also help prevent breast cancer much more than pollution helps promote it.

Q: Is gum disease related to diet?

A: Periodontal (gum) disease, like gingivitis, involves inflammation of the gums and loss of bone and support tissue for the teeth. This inflammation comes from bacterial infection. Brushing and flossing are vital for prevention of gum disease. Smoking increases the risk of gum disease to develop, but nutrition also plays a part. Good nutrition supplies necessary calories, protein, vitamins and minerals to keep your immune system healthy and fight infection.

Q: Is it true that some cancers are related to weight?

A: Yes. Both AICR and the World Health Organization cite the climbing rates of obesity as a key factor behind cancer risk today. Cancers of the colon, kidney, uterus, breast (after menopause), and possibly esophagus appear related to obesity. Excess weight by itself, however, may be only a partial cause of these cancers. Overweight, inactivity and poor diet could all contribute to the disease.

Q: How can I avoid E. coli infections from food?

A: E. coli is short for Escherichia coli, a bacterium that causes severe cramps and diarrhea. E. coli infection is most commonly caught by eating undercooked ground beef or drinking unpasteurized (raw) milk. You can also contract it by eating food touched by people who don't wash their hands well with soap after going to the bathroom. To avoid E. coli infection: Wash your hands carefully with soap before you start cooking. Use a meat thermometer to be sure that you cook ground beef to at least 160°F. Always order ground beef well done, but not charred, in restaurants. When preparing food, don't put cooked hamburgers on a plate that previously held raw ground beef. Defrost meats in the refrigerator or the microwave – not on the counter. Use hot water and soap to wash cutting boards and dishes, if raw meat and poultry have touched them. Refrigerate leftovers right away or throw them away. Because vegetables and fruits could carry the bacteria from other people's hands, thoroughly rinse them under running water before eating.

To read more about all the known causes of cancer, call AICR at 1-800-843-8114, ext. 110.

Request the free brochure *Everything Doesn't Cause Cancer*.