

# Fight cancer with food

BY MICHELLE GIBEAULT TRAUB

Hippocrates said, "Let food be thy medicine." His simple suggestion seems naïve in a modern world, where scientific breakthroughs and new medications are discovered every day. Could what we eat actually impact a complex disease like cancer?

Three-time cancer survivor Diana Grant Dyer is a believer. She wrote "A Dietitian's Cancer Story" to share her personal approach to beating the disease. While she acknowledges that there are no magic foods or pills that will prevent cancer, Dyer is confident that eating a wide variety of whole foods, "including vegetables, fruits, whole grains, legumes, nuts, seeds and

lean protein sources can decrease cancer risk."

Dyer isn't alone in her convictions. The American Cancer Society reports that one-third of cancer deaths result from lifestyle choices related to nutrition and physical activity.

The American Institute for Cancer Research agrees that diet is one of the primary ways to lower cancer risk. Based on its studies, AICR compiled a list of foods proven to fight cancer, including:

- Cruciferous vegetables
- Dark-green leafy vegetables
- Whole grains
- Soy
- Beans
- Berries

- Flaxseed
- Garlic
- Grapes and grape juice
- Green tea
- Tomatoes

An anticancer diet need not be bland. In fact, adding spice to your food offers health benefits. Studies have shown that spices such as cumin and turmeric have anticancer properties. Garlic and chili peppers are also potent flavor enhancers that have been linked to reduced cancer risk.

A nutritious diet is the healthiest option for cancer prevention, but what happens when your diet simply doesn't measure up? Are nutritional supplements a good option?

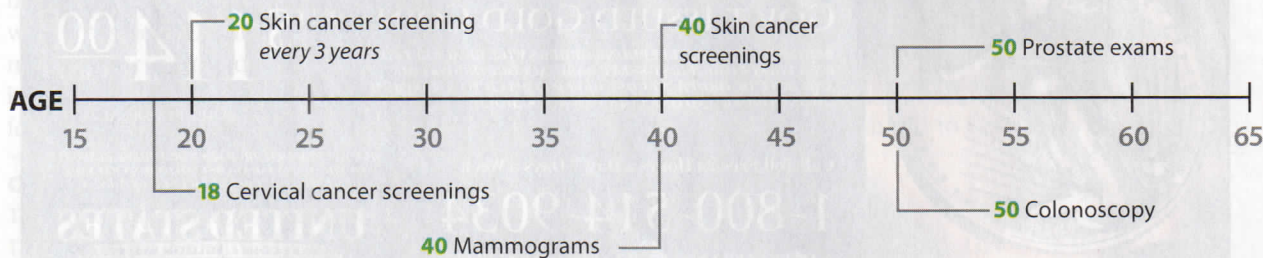
Most medical professionals warn patients to proceed with caution. Their fears are justified, considering the number of conflicting studies that indicate popular supplements like vitamins E and A – once thought to help prevent cancer – actually increase risk in some patients. The safest approach is to get cancer-fighting nutrients like antioxidants, vitamins E and A,



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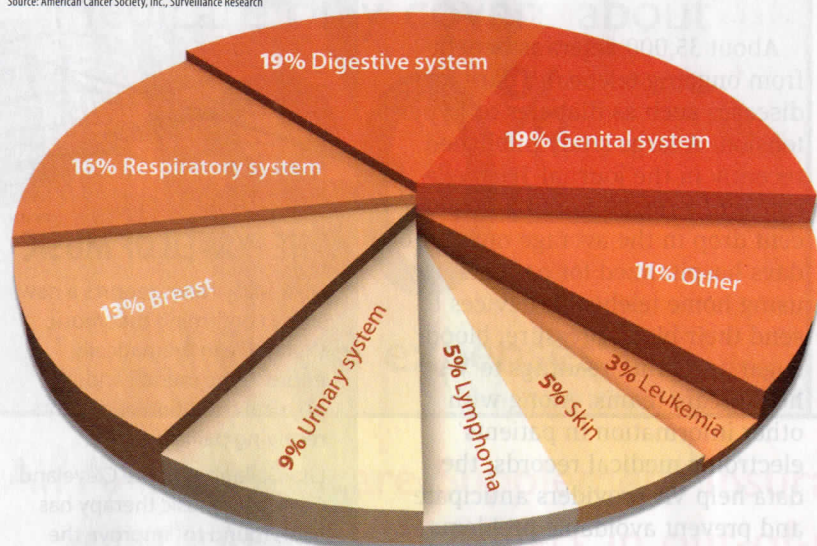
## Preventive-care timeline

Early detection is the key to cancer survival. Performing regular self-checks of the skin, breasts and prostate are important, along with annual doctor visits and tests based on age and risk factors. In addition, any suspicious moles, growths or bowel changes should be promptly addressed by a physician. Experts recommend these annual screenings:



## New cases of cancer in the United States last year

Source: American Cancer Society, Inc., Surveillance Research



and selenium from foods first, and to meet any potential nutritional deficiencies through a basic multivitamin.

An overall cancer prevention strategy includes maintaining a healthy weight, avoiding smoking and participating in regular health check-ups. While diet is just one piece of the puzzle, Hippocrates was certainly on to something.

*Michelle Gibeault Traub is a registered dietitian and health writer in Connecticut. [michelle@webhealthwriter.com](mailto:michelle@webhealthwriter.com)*

## Cancer rates fall

Cancer rates have fallen in the United States for the first time ever, according to a new government report. Reuters reports that better screening, declining smoking rates and better treatments contributed to the decline. Plus, government funding for cancer-fighting research doubled between 1998 and 2003; that also may have played a role in the decline, said Dr. Louis Weiner of Georgetown University's Lombardi Comprehensive Cancer Center. Preventive measures to take: get screened and stop smoking.



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## Anticancer terms

### Free radicals

*n.* Unstable particles that cause oxidation, which damages the body's cells and contributes to aging and disease. Examples of free radicals include tobacco smoke, pollution and UV rays.

### Antioxidants

*n.* Substances that prevent oxidation. Nutrients such as beta carotene, vitamins C and E, and selenium act as antioxidants in the body by deactivating free radicals.

### Phytochemicals

*n.* Compounds found in plants that are considered to be beneficial to health. There are thousands of phytochemicals, including lycopene, beta carotene, lutein and flavonoids.

### Cruciferous

*adj.* A class of vegetables that contain petals resembling a cross. Cruciferous vegetables such as broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower, kale and collard greens contain phytochemicals that have been shown to fight cancer.

Living Well is designed to provide general information. It is not intended to be, nor is it, medical advice. Readers should consult their physicians when they have health problems.

## Reliable cancer resources

**American Cancer Society**  
[www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org)

**American Society of Clinical Oncology,**  
[www.cancer.net](http://www.cancer.net)

**CancerCare,** a free Cancer Support Service  
1-800-813-HOPE (4673)

**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention –** Cancer Prevention and Control, [www.cdc.gov/cancer/](http://www.cdc.gov/cancer/)

**American Institute for Cancer Research,** 1-800-843-8114, [www.aicr.org](http://www.aicr.org)

**National Cancer Institute**  
[www.cancer.gov](http://www.cancer.gov)

**Diana Grant Dyer,** dietitian and cancer survivor, [www.cancerrd.com](http://www.cancerrd.com)

