Can Cancers in Young Adults Be Prevented?

Most cancers in young adults do not have a known cause\(^1\), so it’s not possible to prevent all of them. But there are things you can do that might lower your risk of cancer.

**Limiting lifestyle-related and environmental risk factors**

Lifestyle-related risk factors are not thought to play much of a role in cancers in young adults. A few environmental factors, such as radiation exposure, have been linked with cancer risk in young adults. But some exposures may not be avoidable, such as if a child or teen needs radiation therapy to treat cancer.

However, there are some things you can do to lower your risk of getting certain kinds of cancer throughout your life, such as:

- **Not smoking**\(^2\)
- **Getting to and staying at a healthy weight, and being active**\(^3\)
- **Limiting time spent in the sun and avoiding tanning salons**\(^4\)

While lifestyle-related and environmental risk factors don’t have a large effect on cancers in young adults, exposure to these risk factors during the teen and young adult years can still increase a person’s risk of getting cancer as they get older. It’s important to develop and maintain healthy habits early in life, such as not smoking, staying at a healthy weight, keeping active, and eating a healthy diet. Healthy habits like these can also lower your risk for many other types of health problems later on.
Screening to help prevent certain cancers

Screening is testing for a disease such as cancer in people who don’t have any symptoms. Screening for some types of cancer, such as cervical and colorectal cancer, can actually help find some pre-cancer changes before they have a chance to become cancers.

The risk of cervical cancer is very low in people under the age of 25. The risk rises with age. The American Cancer Society recommends that people with a cervix start being screened for cervical cancer at age 25. (See Can Cervical Cancer Be Found Early?)

Colorectal cancer is much more common in older adults, so screening is not recommended for people at average risk until age 45. But in people who are known to be at high risk, such as those with certain inherited conditions or a strong family history, screening might be recommended earlier – sometimes as early as the teen years. (See American Cancer Society Recommendations for Colorectal Cancer Early Detection for more details.)

Vaccines to help prevent cancer

Some vaccines might lower a person’s risk of getting cancer. For instance, vaccines can help prevent infection with HPV (human papillomavirus), the group of viruses linked to cervical and some other cancers. These vaccines work best if they are given at a younger age, and are recommended to be given to children between age 9 and 12. Teenagers and young adults age 13 to 26 who have not yet been vaccinated, or who haven’t had all their doses, should be vaccinated as soon as possible. For more information, see HPV Vaccines and HPV and Cancer.

Preventive surgery

Rarely, people inherit gene changes that make them very likely to get certain kinds of cancer at an early age. In such cases, some people and their doctors might decide on surgery to remove an organ before cancer has a chance to develop there. Again, this is not common.

Hyperlinks

2. www.cancer.org/healthy/stay-away-from-tobacco.html

**References**


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