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How to Interpret News About Ways to Prevent Cancer

In your quest to be healthy, you may hear about something that is supposed to reduce your risk of cancer -- perhaps a new way you haven't heard about before. It sounds like a good idea, and you may want to try it. But before you try anything new, be sure to ask the right questions as you search for information about ways to prevent cancer.

- [Can cancer be prevented?](#)
- [Where did the information about the new prevention method come from?](#)
- [Is there research that supports the product?](#)
- [What were the actual study results?](#)
- [Other questions about new ways to prevent cancer](#)
- [What do the experts say?](#)
- [Check with your doctor before using any unproven ways to prevent cancer](#)

However, there are many other products and methods that are promoted as ways to prevent cancer. Many of these have not been proven to work and, in some situations, might even be harmful. It is important to learn as much as you can about any products and methods before using them.

their information to see if they might be emphasizing results that benefit them.

Also watch for promotions from a seller or someone who can benefit from you buying their product. Many companies that sell products online talk about the preventive powers of their products, even though they've never been proven to work in people. Some might use outright lies and fraud to make their websites look official. They might even include fake quotes from doctors. Others might report on studies that were either never done or were misrepresented, claiming that they were done at well-known cancer treatment centers. Learn more about what to watch for in [Alternative Medicine](#)¹¹.

Can the original source of the information be traced?

Chain emails, texts, blog posts, and social media are increasingly common sources of information for many people. These posts and emails often spread exciting information and ask people to share them with friends. The original source of the story is often impossible to find, and the actual content can change over time. This type of information needs to be checked against more reliable sources.

Is there research that supports the product?

Getting past the headlines (or article, news story, email, social media post, etc.) to important details isn't always easy. Here are some questions you should ask:

Is the news actually based on new research?

It may be, especially if it's being reported in reliable news media outlets. But sometimes it's not clear where the information actually came from. Rumors passed around in chain emails are a good example of this. If a source is cited, can it be verified? Can you find this same information in trustworthy sources?

Who conducted the research? Who paid for it?

Most cancer studies are done by researchers at universities, medical centers, or government agencies. Some research is done by other groups, such as advocacy organizations. Funding for studies can come from federal or state funds, non-profit groups, or other interests. Finding out where the study was done and who funded it can

To see if a cancer prevention method has a proven track record, look at how it was tested. The way [clinical trials](#)¹² are set up can affect the outcome, and sometimes can make a prevention method look like it works when it really doesn't.

Cancer prevention studies usually have people do something or take something to see if it lowers their risk of cancer. In these studies, healthy volunteers help doctors study ways to lower the risk of certain types of cancer. Cancer prevention clinical trials are done to answer these questions:

- Does the medicine, supplement, or other cancer prevention method reduce the risk of cancer (or a certain type of cancer)?
- How safe is the study medicine or cancer prevention method?
- Does the cancer prevention method lower the risk of dying from cancer (or from a certain type of cancer)?

Is the study published and peer reviewed?

When research findings are published in a respected, peer-reviewed journal, it means that the methods and results of the study were looked at by other doctors or scientists. When they look at the information, they want to be sure that proper scientific procedures were followed.

Most of the time, doctors give more weight to research published in peer-reviewed journals. Summary reports and guidelines created by experts from government agencies or other respected groups are also typically trusted sources of information. Research reported at a medical conference is often important as well, but it has not undergone the same level of review.

Sometimes you might find news about studies that comes from other sources, such as magazines or journals that are not peer reviewed, or books and letters that are supposed to have been written by experts. Be extra careful basing any decisions on this type of information.

Are they reporting anecdotal information?

If you hear or read about a person who is healthy and feeling great using a particular prevention method, this is called **anecdotal information**. This is a personal report of one person or very few people, but it's not the same as the results of a scientific study. Trustworthy studies about cancer prevention involve looking at a lot of people over time.

Still, if you've been told someone's personal story, can you find out more? Keep in mind that a person may credit an herb or supplement with feeling better, even though there may be other factors involved. And sometimes a person's belief in a method may be enough to make a person feel better for at least a short time.

There are many other ways that people with good intentions can reach the wrong conclusion from a single person's experience, or even the experiences of a group of people. This is why scientists study cancer prevention methods under such careful conditions.

What if there isn't any research data reported?

If you aren't able to find any research data to support a prevention method, it could be that it either has not been put through careful studies, or it was studied and was found not to help prevent cancer.

For instance, you may hear about alternative therapies such as herbs, vitamins, other dietary supplements, health tonics, "body cleansings," or special diets that are supposed to boost the immune system and prevent cancer. In the past, sellers often made these claims even though almost no studies had been done to look at these methods. Researchers are now trying to study more of these in the same careful ways that they study treatments.

If you can't find research data on a prevention method you're interested in, ask your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist to help you find more information.

What were the actual study results?

Have other studies of the same method had the same results?

It usually takes more than one study to prove a method works. In fact, it's rare for doctors to recommend a prevention method based on just one study. Most often, recommendations are based on the results of multiple studies. So, if a news report focuses on one research study, look at how many people were studied and whether there have been other studies that had similar results.

Sometimes when multiple studies are done, researchers can get different and sometimes opposite results. Sometimes a treatment looks great in the first study, but then other studies have different outcomes. This is why it's important to look for information beyond one promising study result.

Other questions about new ways to prevent cancer**Is the method supposed to prevent all cancers?**

Since there are many different types of cancer, which often have different causes, it's very unlikely that one method can prevent all of them. Be careful about claims that there's one method that prevents all types of cancer.

Who is offering the procedure, medicine, or supplement?

talk with your doctor, nurse, or pharmacist about it to get their opinion of it. If it's a vitamin, herb, or supplement, see what you can find out about how much proof there is that it works, as well as possible side effects, allergies, and other possible problems. You should also let your doctor or pharmacist know about it in case it might cause a problem with any medicines you're taking. Often, studies of "natural remedies" don't collect this sort of information, and it can be hard to find.

We encourage you to learn all you can before taking any new method to try to lower your risk of cancer. You can always call the American Cancer Society. We can help you get more information on almost any treatment or method you're considering.

Hyperlinks

1. www.cancer.org/cancer/risk-prevention/tobacco.html
2. www.cancer.org/cancer/risk-prevention/diet-physical-activity/eat-healthy.html
3. www.cancer.org/cancer/risk-prevention/diet-physical-activity/get-active.html
4. www.cancer.org/cancer/risk-prevention/diet-physical-activity/acs-guidelines-nutrition-physical-activity-cancer-prevention/guidelines.html
5. www.cancer.org/cancer/risk-prevention/sun-and-uv.html
6. www.cancer.org/cancer/risk-prevention/infections/infections-that-can-lead-to-cancer/viruses.html
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8. www.cancer.org/cancer/types/breast-cancer/risk-and-prevention/deciding-whether-to-use-medicine-to-reduce-breast-cancer-risk.html
9. www.cancer.org/cancer/types/breast-cancer/risk-and-prevention/preventive-surgery-to-reduce-breast-cancer-risk.html
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14. www.cancer.org/cancer/managing-cancer/treatment-types/complementary-and-integrative-medicine/dietary-supplements.html

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