

# Live Healthy Georgia – Seniors Taking Charge!

April 2008 Newsletter



## Spring into Cancer Control Month

By Mindy Bell, BS



Spring showers and flowers are on the way, and so are new crops of colorful fruits and vegetables as warm weather returns. When you think about fruits and vegetables, health and disease prevention may come to mind, and for good reason. In fact, April is cancer control month, so it's a perfect time to think about prevention through healthy habits, such as eating fruits and vegetables and other nutritious foods. Prevention can also mean catching problems in their early stages, when diseases tend to be more treatable and chances of survival are greater. Whether for yourself, or in honor of a loved one who's had cancer, remember that a little effort toward prevention can go a long way toward keeping you healthy.

Cancer is the second leading cause of death in the U.S. after heart disease. The term cancer refers to when abnormal cells in the body divide without control. Cancerous cells may spread to different parts of the body and disrupt normal functioning of organs. Cancer can appear in many

different organs and systems in the body, such as the colon, breast, prostate, upper digestive tract, and lung. Causes of cancer are related to many factors, including diet and lifestyle, hormones, chemicals, radiation, heredity, and even viruses and bacteria.

Lifestyle factors have been identified as important contributors to cancer risk. As such, the American Cancer Society publishes guidelines for physical activity and healthful food choices for cancer prevention every five years. The latest guidelines published in 2006 provide important information that can motivate us to live healthier lives that promote cancer prevention and overall good health. The American Institute for Cancer Research/World Cancer Research Fund also have publications that synthesize current research to help direct cancer prevention efforts. Here are some of the main highlights from these organizations that can help us to make good choices for cancer prevention:

# Live Healthy Georgia – Seniors Taking Charge!

*Maintain a healthy body weight.* Balancing the amount of energy you take in from foods you eat with the energy you expend through physical activity can help you to maintain a healthy body weight. Remember to make the bulk of your food choices nutrient-rich ones, such as fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and low-fat milk and protein sources. Eat fish and poultry with the skin removed more often than red meats and processed meats, and use lean cooking methods, such as baking, steaming, and braising. Other ways to avoid excessive energy intake are to control portion sizes at meals and snacks, and to limit foods high in fat and added sugar.

*Be physically active.* Aim for at least 30 minutes of moderate activity on most days of the week.

*Choose a variety of healthy plant foods.* Colorful fruits and vegetables, legumes, as well as whole grains, should be important daily food choices. Seven to ten servings of fruits and vegetables daily, and half your grain choices as whole grain will help you to have a plant-rich diet.



*Focus on whole foods.* Choose whole foods over individual dietary supplements, such as antioxidants. Not only is the food more satisfying and flavorful, the benefits of isolated nutrients may not provide the same benefits as eating the whole food for cancer prevention, or may even cause adverse effects.

*Other guidelines:* Be smoke free (avoid all tobacco products) and if you drink alcohol, do so in moderation. Talk with your doctor about regular recommended health screenings you should get, such as mammograms for women to screen for breast cancer, and colorectal cancer screenings. These check-ups are important for early detection because symptoms may not be present in the early stages to alert you.

These guidelines are consistent with those issued to prevent other chronic diseases, such as heart disease and diabetes, so by practicing healthy habits for cancer prevention, you are helping your health in more ways than one!

For more information, see these resources: National Cancer Institute, [www.cancer.gov](http://www.cancer.gov). American Cancer Society, [www.acs.org](http://www.acs.org) American Institute for Cancer Research, [www.aicr.org](http://www.aicr.org)