

# **Genetics Aren't to Blame: What People THINK Causes Cancer, Vs. What REALLY Causes Cancer**

By Leigh Erin Connealy, MD

Despite what most people have heard, cancer is only about 5-10 percent genetic, which means the hereditary potential is relatively low.<sup>1</sup> If that's the case, what determines who develops this disease? Over the years, research has shown that lifestyle choices, environmental exposures, and other external factors play a much greater part in cancer risk than previously believed.

I often tell patients, "Each decision you make is a healthcare decision." Every single day, every waking hour, you are presented with choices that can either make or break your health. From what foods you ingest to how much you exercise to sunlight exposure to the hours you sleep each night, it all matters. Making the right choices can lead to either vitality or ill health. The good news is you have the power to choose.

## **It's All About the Terrain**

I know I sound like a broken record, but I say this repeatedly for a reason: It's true! To protect the body from cancer and other chronic diseases, it's essential to heal the terrain. Let's say you have been diagnosed with cancer. Even if you kill off the actual cancer cells, if you don't change the environment these malignant cells were growing and thriving in, the chance for recurrence is almost inevitable.

The reality is that cancer cells *can* revert to normal cells, and tumor growth *can* be restrained. Your body wants to heal and be healthy. You just need to give it the support it needs to work its magic.

## **Take Control: The Everyday Choices That Can Stop Cancer Before It Starts**

It should empower you to know that your daily choices can significantly contribute to your cancer risk. Outlined below are key areas you can focus on—starting now—that can have a measurable and positive impact on your vitality and longevity.

### ***Nutrition***

I do not typically give blanket nutritional recommendations, since every person is unique and has different circumstances. However, in over 30 years of practicing medicine, I have found that many

➔ patients do well on a ketogenic or modified ketogenic diet for a variety of health issues. The reasons are several-fold.

For those not familiar with the ketogenic, or keto diet, these are the basics: You significantly reduce carbohydrate intake and increase consumption of healthy fats, forcing the body into a metabolic state called ketosis. In this state, the body burns fat that the liver has broken down into ketones for fuel instead of glucose. Burning fat versus glucose for energy leads to a variety of positive outcomes, from weight loss and better blood sugar management to improved cardiovascular health and reduced systemic inflammation.

The relationship between sugar and cancer is a tricky one. My patients often ask if eating sugar factors into cancer risk. While eating sugar doesn't directly cause cancer, some of the underlying factors at work can disrupt the body's terrain, making you more susceptible.

- Excess sugar intake can lead to blood sugar issues such as diabetes and obesity, two independent risk factors for cancer.
- Eating too much sugar fuels the fungal infection, *Candida*. Again, this throws the body out of equilibrium as it works to remedy the overgrowth.
- Consuming high levels of sugar can systemically increase inflammation and affect hormone levels, two additional risk factors that may contribute to cancer.

It is complicated because cancer cells require glucose as an energy source—but so do healthy cells. The bottom line is that eliminating sugar from your diet will have positive effects on your overall health and can help ward off cancer and other chronic diseases. Need to curb that sweet tooth? Safe, natural sweetener options include stevia, allulose, and monk fruit.

Several resources are available online and at your local library regarding the specifics of following a keto or modified keto diet. That said, it is always advisable to work with a qualified healthcare practitioner who can advise you on which nutritional plan would work best for you. One excellent resource is *Liliana's Keto Cookbook*,<sup>ii</sup> available from Amazon.com and other retailers.

### **Exercise**

Depending on which statistics you read, regular exercise can decrease your risk of cancer anywhere from 10 to 60 percent. Moving the more than 800 muscles in your body regularly, and stimulating the circulatory and lymphatic systems, isn't just a suggestion if you want to prevent disease and stay healthy—it's a must.

In a recent study published in the journal *Molecular Oncology*, researchers noted, “Strong and consistent evidence exists that higher levels of physical activity reduce the risk of six different cancer sites (bladder, breast, colon, endometrial, esophageal adenocarcinoma, gastric cardia)... Sedentary behavior, independent of physical activity, has been shown to increase the risk of colon, endometrial, and lung cancers. Obesity is an established risk factor for 13 different cancer sites (endometrial, postmenopausal breast, colorectal, esophageal, renal/kidneys, meningioma, pancreatic, gastric cardia, liver, multiple myeloma, ovarian, gallbladder, and thyroid).”<sup>iii</sup>

Find a form of exercise you enjoy doing and engage in that activity for at least 30-45 minutes each day, most days of the week. Think outside the box if you are bored with the standard walking, jogging, biking, or gym routine. Try a dance class, join a recreational sports league, play ultimate frisbee, rent a kayak or stand-up paddleboard, pick up a hula hoop, or test out a martial arts class like kickboxing to change things up. The important thing is that you get—and stay—moving.

Adding a few sessions of resistance training per week is also imperative, especially as you get older. Higher muscle mass has been associated with a lower cancer risk and better outcomes for those diagnosed with the disease. Cachexia (muscle-wasting) is a common and detrimental side effect that many patients with cancer experience. Traditional weightlifting is an excellent option; however, you can also exercise without equipment using your own body weight for resistance. Squats, lunges, push-ups, burpees, and planks can all be done in the comfort of your own home.

### **Stress Reduction/Mental Health**

I know I mention the connection between stress, mental health, and cancer a lot. It's because nearly

every patient I've seen with a cancer diagnosis has had some form of trauma, unresolved conflict, or extreme amounts of stress in their lives. You must process these feelings and relieve yourself of emotional turmoil because, left untreated, mental burdens can be highly detrimental to your well-being.

Try de-stressing and working through anxiety and other mental struggles with daily practices such as yoga, meditation, tai chi, journaling, talking to a trusted friend or counselor, or watching a funny movie or show.

One therapy that I recommend to all my patients is EVOX. This emotional-healing treatment relies on a technique called "perception reframing." When someone speaks, the intonation and energy in their voice reflect how they feel about specific topics. EVOX records this information, plots it on a Perception Index graph, and shares data that reveals which frequency signatures would work best to heal that person's unique stressors. These frequency signatures are transmitted back to the person using a specialized hand cradle while they relax, listen to music, and focus on their specific area of healing. EVOX is an excellent biofeedback tool that can combat stress and anxiety and help resolve past emotional trauma.

### ***Exposure to Environmental Toxins***

Unfortunately, we live in a world where known carcinogens are abundant. According to the World Health Organization, some of the most dangerous include ultraviolet and ionizing radiation, asbestos, excess alcohol, tobacco smoke, and arsenic.<sup>iv</sup> Other chemicals and heavy metals, such as mercury, cadmium, chromium, lead, and aluminum, pollute our soil, water supply, and air we breathe. While some exposure is inevitable, you should do what you can to limit or remove as many of these toxins as possible from your daily life. You'll find several solutions for eliminating toxins from your home below, so let's focus on a few other areas for now.

It goes without saying that smoking is terrible for your health. Do whatever it takes to quit, and remember secondhand smoke is also toxic, so do not let others smoke in or around your home. Excessive alcohol intake is another factor within your control. Be mindful of your drinking habits, and, please, seek professional help if needed. Buy organic, pesticide-free produce and protein sources whenever possible. Drink filtered water—and steer clear of plastic bottles. Throw open your windows and let the fresh air into your home. Consider buying air-purifying houseplants such as snake plants, peace lilies, spider plants, or English ivy to help scrub indoor air. And stay out of the sun, or wear dark, protective clothing during the midday and afternoon when sunlight is strong and UV levels are high.

Small steps go a long way toward reducing your exposure to environmental carcinogens, and every little change helps lower your toxic burden.

### **[Box]**

#### **Eight Items You Won't Find in My Home**

So many carcinogenic chemicals try to sneak into our four walls by way of toxic household cleaners, personal care products, and even the water we drink. Here are eight items I will never buy or keep in my home, along with safer, healthier alternatives.

**Make-Up and Beauty Products Filled with Chemicals:** The lotions, sunscreens, make-up, and other self-care products we use daily can contain dangerous chemicals and endocrine disruptors that are

absorbed into our bodies through direct contact. To find safe, clean products, use the Skin Deep database from the Environmental Working Group. ([www.ewg.org/skindeep/](http://www.ewg.org/skindeep/))

**Toxic Household Cleaners:** Commercial cleaning products are loaded with known carcinogens and other harmful ingredients. Using natural cleaning agents such as vinegar and essential oils is a much safer choice. You can check the toxicity levels of common household cleaners at the Environmental Working Group's website, [www.ewg.org/cleaners/](http://www.ewg.org/cleaners/).

**Chemical-laden Teflon-Coated Cookware:** Instead, use non-toxic ceramic or stainless steel pots and pans.

**Coffeemakers and Coffee Pots Made with Plastic Components:** Opt for carafes and pitchers made entirely of stainless steel.

**Chemical Air Fresheners/Room Fragrance Sprays:** Try diffusing essential oils from a clean, reputable source instead. Better still, look for a propolis diffuser that not only cleans the air of toxins but also enhances health in multiple ways.

**Unfiltered Tap Water:** Several options for clean, filtered water exist, from whole-house filtration systems to pitchers and even personal water bottles. One good brand is Echo Water ([www.echowater.com](http://www.echowater.com)).

**Wi-Fi at Night:** Eliminating electromagnetic field (EMF) pollution in your home at night is crucial for achieving peaceful sleep and better overall health. You can install a Wi-Fi kill switch that turns off Wi-Fi at the touch of a button. For further protection, purchase an EMF canopy for your bed.

**Plastic Food Storage Containers:** Ditch all the hormone-disrupting plastic containers in your kitchen and switch to glass or stainless steel.

I understand if this seems overwhelming, but these changes don't all have to be made at once. Implement them one at a time, little by little, and note how much better you feel. That said, if I had to choose one item to address first, it would be the water in your home. Clean, filtered, plastic- and chemical-free water is a must.

**[End Box]**

### **Health-Enhancing Practices to Live By**

There are several therapies and practices you can incorporate into your weekly—sometimes daily—routine that can enhance health and help prevent disease. In addition to making changes in the lifestyle areas addressed above, add a handful of these treatments into your regular regimen, and take note of how much better you feel.

#### ***Infrared Sauna***

Raising your body temperature through sauna therapy induces sweating, which eliminates toxins and increases circulation. Regular use of a sauna confers several benefits, including lower blood pressure, reduced inflammation, and pain relief, among others.

#### ***Grounding***

Connecting directly to the Earth's surface by walking barefoot on grass, soil, or sand helps rejuvenate and

restore the body by absorbing electrons from the planet's surface. Grounding acts as a natural antioxidant, neutralizing free radicals and improving overall health. Plus, being outside barefoot fosters your connection with nature, helps you be mindful, and allows you to enjoy a little light physical activity.

### ***Nightly Hot Detox Baths***

Fewer activities relax the body and calm the mind more than a nightly hot bath. Adding Epsom salt and detoxifying minerals, such as magnesium, can help the body release toxins, soothe sore muscles, and support peaceful sleep. These mineral baths are a safe and easy way to detox daily.

### ***Dry Brushing, Rebounding, & Lymphatic Drainage Massage***

The primary role of the lymphatic system is to “take out the trash” in our bodies. Stimulating this system automatically removes cellular waste and helps the immune system function optimally. Dry brushing, rebounding, and lymphatic-draining massages all help facilitate this crucial detoxification process. (You can find multiple YouTube and other videos online detailing proper dry brushing techniques.)

### ***Daily Sun Exposure***

The benefits of sun exposure at the right time and in the proper dosage are undeniable. Letting those morning rays soak in while you enjoy your tea or coffee helps wake up your internal clock and keeps your circadian rhythm regular. Once the UV index starts to rise, take advantage of those UVA and UVB rays. Your skin requires both to produce adequate vitamin D, so getting outdoors in the sunshine for 15-20 minutes each day without sunscreen or protective clothing is ideal. If you live in an area with limited sunshine, you may need to supplement with vitamin D3. Ask your doctor to order a 25-hydroxyvitamin D blood test to assess your baseline level, and supplement as necessary to maintain an optimal range of 50–70 ng/mL.

### ***Tying It All Together***

No one is perfect. And we won't make ideal choices 100 percent of the time. But as I mentioned at the start of this article, much of our health lies in our hands, and we do have quite a bit of say in whether cancer affects us personally. Each beautiful day presents a new opportunity to make decisions that support, rather than hinder, long-term well-being. Don't ever forget that.

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### ***About Dr. Connealy***

Leigh Erin Connealy, MD, is a pioneer in integrative and functional medicine and the Medical Director of the renowned [Cancer Center for Healing](#) and [Center for New Medicine](#) in Irvine, California—the largest integrative medical clinic in North America. Visited by more than 90,000 patients from around the world, Dr. Connealy and her expert team provide a cutting-edge, holistic approach to healing that blends the best of conventional and integrative therapies.

A leading voice in the field, she is the bestselling author of *The Cancer Revolution* and *Be Perfectly Healthy*, and is regularly named one of the Top Functional & Integrative Doctors in the United States. Dr. Connealy is also a sought-after speaker, featured on national television, radio, podcasts, conferences,

and online summits, where she shares her in-depth knowledge and passion for genuine, lasting wellness.

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<sup>i</sup> <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC2515569/>

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.amazon.com/Lilianas-Keto-Cookbook-Liliana-Partida/dp/B09S5ZPV75>

<sup>iii</sup> <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32741068/>

<sup>iv</sup> <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/cancer>