

Reduce Your Cancer Risk: Put Down That Doughnut

Obesity-related cancers are on the rise; watching your weight is a strong defense.



As if you really needed another reason to watch your weight, here's one more: It helps prevent cancer.

Pretty big, huh?

“We know that it's estimated that 100,000 cases of cancer in the United States each year are linked to excess body fat. There're 12 cancers that have been linked with obesity,” says Lesley Klein, oncology dietitian at Sylvester Comprehensive Cancer Center. “It's kind of scary.”



"IT'S ESTIMATED THAT 100,000 CASES OF CANCER IN THE U.S. EACH YEAR ARE LINKED TO EXCESS BODY FAT."

LESLEY KLEIN

Perhaps even scarier is that even though it's so easily preventable, rates of obesity-related cancers are going up fastest among young adults.

"Indeed, the younger, the faster," according to the author of a recent study published in *The Lancet*.

(That's important, if you don't know. *The Lancet* is like the Ford F-150 of medical journals — you know the commercial, "It doesn't just raise the bar, pal. It is the bar!")

The study found that millennials showed higher rates of six obesity-related cancers — colorectal, endometrial, gallbladder, kidney, multiple myeloma and pancreatic — nearly double, in two-thirds of those types, what their parents did.

Eat less, smile more

Yes, what you eat is part of it. (Maybe even a big part, depending on what you choose to chow down on.) But how much you eat — actually, overeat — is directly to blame. Science says so.

“The actual problem is the obesity,” Klein says. “Because we know that excess fat tissue produces hormones and too much body fat produces high levels of proteins called cytokines, and then the high levels of the hormones and the cytokines trigger inflammation. And then we know that a chronic state of inflammation is tied to a higher risk of cancer.”

But, in our health-conscious, fitness-obsessed society, how can this be?

Simple answers? One, because as obsessed as we may be, most of us aren’t fit. And, two, because most of us understand that cigarettes cause cancer, and that obesity is associated with increased risk of heart disease and diabetes, but obesity and cancer? Not so much.

“The bigger problem is that even though it increases the risk of cancer,” says Klein, “seven out of 10 Americans are currently either overweight or obese and only about half of them even are aware that obesity and cancer have a link.”

She’s being generous. A 2018 American Society of Clinical Oncology survey put it at only 35 percent.

But here’s a blunt figure you should think about next time you’re loading up your plate, or reaching for “just one more” cookie.

“The number one killer in the United States is heart disease. Number two is cancer,” says Klein. “And they’ve both been linked with our diet.”

Carlos Harrison is a contributing writer for UMiami Health News. He is a former national and international television correspondent, as well as a newspaper and magazine writer and editor.