

- **Cancer**

Kaylin Kwan, Macy 4-H Club, L.A. County 4-H Youth Healthy Living Chair

Cancer is a disease where abnormal cells divide uncontrollably and invade nearby tissues.

Healthy cells grow and divide to form new cells as the body needs them. When they become old or damaged, they die and new cells take their place. Cancer develops when the old or damaged cells do not die, yet new ones still continue to form even though they are not needed. These extra cells can divide without stopping and eventually form tumors.

According to the American Cancer Society, there will be an estimated 1,688,780 new cancer cases diagnosed and a total of 600,920 cancer deaths in the US in 2017. Ranking as #2 in the leading causes of death in America, many people are taking steps to ensure they are taking preventative measures from developing this disease. But when risk seems to be everywhere, it can be hard to identify what you actually need to do to protect yourself.

By far, lung cancer is the deadliest cancer in the US. Luckily for us, smoking is the single most preventable cause. That's why so many people are giving up the habit, says Dr. Graham Colditz, a cancer prevention expert at Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis. By the most recent count, only 15% of Americans smoke, which is down from the 42% in the 1960s.

Body fat encourages inflammation, promotes oxidation of cells, weakens the immune system, and too much can raise the risk of at least 13 different types of cancer. A nutritionist and cancer prevention expert at the University of Arizona in Tucson, Cynthia Thomson, says, "Even if your weight is normal, you can be at risk for colon cancer if you have abdominal fat," she says. This can be prevented with a regular workout, which reduces the risk of more than a dozen different types of cancer.

The Center for Disease Control and Prevention states that cases of skin cancer are becoming more common. Indoor tanning should be avoided at all times and try to use sunscreen whenever you're spending long periods of time outside.

Alcohol damages cells in the esophagus, digestive tract, and liver, setting the pace for cancer. It also raises levels of estrogen, which can encourage breast cancer. According to the American Cancer Society, men should consume no more than two alcoholic drinks a day and women should limit to no more than one.

Although cancer can be a very frightening illness, there are definitely ways to prevent it. Becoming educated on what cancer is, what can cause some of the different types, and knowing ways to lower your chances of developing it will help you live a healthier life.