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monthly nutrigram

Cancer: Good News, Bad News

The American Cancer Society's (ACS) most recent report on annual cancer statistics brings some bad news. Cancer now causes the greatest number of deaths for Americans under the age of 85 – that's up from its position of the number one killer of Americans under the age of 65. But this health headline is not quite as ominous as it sounds. Partly responsible for cancer's new ranking is that deaths from heart disease, still the nation's overall biggest killer, have been steadily falling since 1975. Deaths from cancer are sort of a mixed bag because it is not really one disease, but many, with deaths from some types falling while others are increasing.

The not-so-bad news is that about one third of cancer deaths is due to poor quality nutrition, inactivity, and obesity – and could therefore be prevented. Another third of cancer deaths is due to tobacco use. So roughly two thirds of cancer deaths could be related to lifestyle habits. Take a look at some of the lifestyle changes that can lower your risk of cancer:

- **Don't smoke.** Smoking remains the number one cause of preventable death in the United States – contributing to various cancers, heart disease, and stroke. Despite a decline in lung cancer deaths for men, it remains the number one cause of cancer death for both women and men. This is obviously one habit well worth quitting.
- **Eat a “plant-based” diet.** Many studies strongly suggest that eating a diet rich in fruits, vegetables, and whole grains can greatly cut your risk for a variety of cancers including colon cancer – the number three biggest cancer killer for Americans. Be sure to include two to three servings a week of vegetables from the “cruciferous” (or cabbage) family such as broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, and Brussels sprouts, which seem to be particularly potent cancer fighters.
- **Increase physical activity.** Unrelated as it may sound, physical activity may help you reduce your risk of breast and colon cancer.
- **Lose weight.** The authors of the ACS report speculate that one reason for the increase in some cancer deaths could be due to the obesity epidemic.
- **Limit alcohol.** While moderate alcohol intake is actually good for heart health, alcohol and cancer don't mix. Moderation is still the key, but it won't protect you from cancer the way it helps heart disease. For women who have actually had breast cancer, less is definitely best. Moderation for women is no more than one drink per day on average while men may have two!

Once you've mastered these lifestyle changes, you may want to add a few more such as eating more soy foods, yogurt, fish, and drinking green tea. Some research shows that these foods may also protect against certain cancers. Trying new foods can add an interesting new dimension to your food choices. So have fun and approach new foods with a sense of adventure. For more information on cancer prevention, visit the American Cancer Society's website at www.cancer.org.