

#1: Soda



The main danger in soda is the sugar, usually in form of high fructose corn syrup. Fructose is the most challenging form of sugar for your body to handle. With more than a [full day's worth of sugar](#) in one can, it sends your blood sugar through the roof and yet doesn't make you feel full, potentially leading to overeating later.

Colas also contain caramel color, which sounds innocent but is actually an artificial coloring that has the carcinogenic chemical 4-MEI as a byproduct.

Instead – Sparkling water with a splash of fruit juice is a good alternative.

#2: Grilled red meat



Experts recommend limiting your intake of fatty red meat to just a couple of servings per week to reduce your cancer risk. When you do indulge, you may want to avoid those char marks, as tasty as they are.

Food cooked to a high temperature produces [acrylamide](#), a known carcinogen. And meat cooked on the grill, unless it's electric, also takes on unhealthy stuff from the charcoal or wood.

Instead – Reduce your overall intake of red meat, choose organic, grass fed beef, and be careful not to overcook it.

#3: Microwave popcorn



Popcorn is a healthy snack in general, but prepared in a [microwave bag](#), it becomes a cancer-causing nightmare. First, the “butter” flavoring often contains diacetyl (or a close cousin) that is known to be toxic. The bags themselves are lined with a chemical called PFOA, which studies show is carcinogenic

And lastly, popcorn growers are not required to report whether or not their kernels are GMO, but they most likely are – more than 93% of corn planted in the US alone is genetically modified.

Instead – Buy organic kernels and pop them in an air popper or on your stove. Olive oil and a combination of your favorite dried herbs is a great healthy topping.

#4: Canned food, especially tomatoes



Canned vegetables tend to be jam packed with added salt as part of the preservative process, and fruits are often canned in straight sugar syrup. That is problematic in itself, but even worse is the fact that the cans are lined with a chemical called [BPA](#). A known hormone disrupter that has been linked to cancer, BPA leaches into the food that comes in contact with it.

The effect is amplified with foods that are naturally acidic, so tomatoes are especially risky to eat from a can.

Instead – Eat fresh or frozen produce, or at least look for cans that are low-sodium and labeled BPA-free.

#5: Hydrogenated oils



Oils that cannot be extracted from their source naturally become [hydrogenated](#) by the chemical processing required. Vegetable oils, for example, are not just chemically extracted, they are also colored and then have their natural scent removed.

The end product looks nice, but is full of unhealthy omega-6 fats. Unfortunately most commercial baked goods use hydrogenated oils, not to mention fried snack foods.

Instead – Choose naturally extracted olive, soy, or canola oil for home cooking, and avoid store bought cakes and cookies.

#6: Farmed salmon



Wild-caught salmon is a very healthy protein and is safe to serve as a staple in your diet. It may be hard to find, however, as most salmon found in grocery stores today is farmed. Once again, human intervention with a natural product has rendered it unhealthy.

Farmed salmon live an overcrowded stressful life and are force fed unnatural diets that include antibiotics. The result is filets containing cancer-causing PCBs, mercury, and dioxins. Farmed salmon are also fatter than their wild cousins.

Instead – Eat wild-caught sockeye salmon or augment your diet with a purified fish oil supplement.

#7: Artificial sweeteners



There is much debate over the safety of artificial sweeteners, but given that they do not actually help to control blood sugar, there is little reason to choose them over real sugar. Sweeteners prevent the body from being able to accurately recognize your daily calorie consumption and actually cause you to crave more sweets.

[Aspartame](#) is at the top of the suspect list when it comes to cancer-causing chemicals, but all are thought to break down into a toxin called DKP during digestion, which then releases further carcinogenic chemicals. In this way, artificial sweeteners have been linked to brain tumors.

Alternatives – If really prefer a sweetener, use plant-based Stevia. However, it may be best to just have the real sugar but limit how much you consume. Find ways to substitute applesauce or other healthier ingredients in your home cooking.

#8: Refined white flour



Whole grains are a healthy part of any diet, but when they go through the refining process to produce white flour, all of the vital nutrients are stripped away. Then the flour is blasted with chlorine gas in order to make it nice and white. What you're left with is a product that's not only drenched in poison, it is a pure carbohydrate, ready to break down to simple sugar in your system.

That leads to a blood sugar spike and crash. Don't forget that sugar is cancer's favorite fuel, so leaving a lot of excess cycling in your blood every day sets up a perfect environment for cancer cells to grow.

Instead – Unfortunately, this product is in most commercially produced baked goods, so you may want to bake at home more. Choose unbleached, whole wheat flour for that purpose, and read labels carefully to determine how much of the white stuff is in packaged products. Your grocery's bread aisle should actually have a number of whole grain choices alongside of the white bread.

#9: Non-organic fruits & vegetables



Commercial growers are in a bind when it comes to using pesticides. On the one hand, pests can absolutely destroy a crop. On the other, produce coated in poison presents a health risk to consumers. But while safe organic methods of farming do exist, they cost a bit more, so it's consumers who end up having their wellbeing put at risk. Non-organic produce is contaminated with [dangerous pesticides](#) including atrazine, thiodicarb, and organophosphates.

Atrazine alone has been found to cause severe health and reproductive issues in humans. Always behind the curve in terms of consumer safety, the US continues to use atrazine regularly, even though it has been banned in European countries.

Instead – Buy organic produce as much as you can afford, especially those items on the [Dirty Dozen](#) list, which have the highest levels of pesticide residue. And of course, carefully wash all produce before eating.

#10: Processed meat



Almost any [processing of meat](#) before or during cooking can make it more dangerous. Products like bacon, hot dogs, deli meats, and sausage are loaded with huge amounts of salt plus cancer-causing chemicals like nitrate and nitrite. All that junk makes the product look better and last longer, but does no favors for your body.

Unfortunately, even meats that are naturally smoked still take on tar during processing, which is just as bad for you in food as it is in cigarettes. Incidentally, studies have shown that eating red meat every day increases the lifetime risk of cancer by 22%.

Instead – Buy from your local butcher; they tend to offer fresher, less processed meats and are happy to answer questions about their products. From the grocery store, choose organic meats and other products labeled as free of nitrate and nitrite.

#11: Potato chips



Potatoes are mostly carbohydrate, but can be healthy when baked and eaten in their whole form (skin too). Potato chips, on the other hand, are one of the least healthy snacks you can choose. For one thing, they are fried in trans fats and then positively coated in salt. They also usually contain chemical preservatives and artificial coloring.

All of these additives have a negative effect on heart health as well as circulation, even before the hit of carbohydrates spikes your blood sugar. More troubling is the presence of [acrylamide](#), a carcinogen found in all foods that are heated to a high temperature, as chips are when fried.

Instead – Choose pretzels, air popped popcorn, dried apple or banana chips, and baked whole grain pita chips dipped in hummus or guacamole.

#12: GMO foods



The debate rages on about the safety of genetically modified foods, but little has been done in the way of conclusive studies on the matter. First introduced to the market in 1994, we are only just getting to the point where the long term safety can be studied – however, as the “recipe” for genetically modified produce is always changing, the issue is complicated. What we do know is that in a rat study on the effects of GMOs, every one of the subjects developed pre-cancerous cell growth within 10 days of exposure.

Most GMOs are banned in Europe, but not in the United States. Major agricultural companies like GMOs because they resist pests better, last longer, and are easier to transport long distances. But is the risk to human health really worth it?

Instead – Show your support for nature’s recipe by buying organic produce and meats. When you choose packaged foods, always look for a Non-GMO label.

#13: Alcohol



Before you panic, the studies that [link alcohol to cancer](#) all refer to excess alcohol. You can still consume up to one drink per day for women and two for men and be in the safe zone, but know that there is really no redeeming health reason to drink alcohol at all.

The National Cancer Institute reports that exceeding the safe zone ups your risk of mouth, esophagus, liver, colon, and rectal cancers. In fact, drinking to excess is thought to be the number two preventable cause of cancer worldwide, after smoking cigarettes.

Instead – Most of us would hate to give up the occasional social drink, and you don't have to. But try to avoid drinking when you're just bored and definitely don't rely on it for stress relief. [Red wine](#) is a relatively healthy choice, as it contains a cancer-fighting compound called resveratrol.

#14: Refined sugars



The worst offender in the category of refined sugars is high fructose corn syrup, which you probably know is found in a ton of processed foods and drinks. One soda, for example, contains 15 teaspoons of the stuff! Cancer loves to feed on sugar, but fructose is especially troublesome because of how hard your body must work to process it.

Unable to be used as fuel in its whole form, your liver must first break it down. When too much hits your system at once, the liver ends up storing a lot as fat, leading to a condition called non-alcoholic fatty liver disease. NAFLD is in itself a [risk factor for liver cancer](#).

Instead – Once you start reading labels faithfully, you will be horrified by the amount of refined sugar in packaged foods. It is best to satisfy your sweet tooth with whole fruit rather than candy, but antioxidant-containing dark chocolate can also be a smart splurge.

#15: Margarine



Originally developed as a healthier alternative to butter, margarine is actually just the opposite. Made from vegetable oils, it is full of trans fats. Recent studies have shown that eating a diet high in trans fats ups your risk of early death by a staggering 34%, mainly from heart related issues.

But margarine may also pose a cancer risk. By-products of heating vegetable oil to a high temperature during production are the chemicals lycidol and 3-MCPD. When these chemicals are digested, it [releases toxins](#) into the body.

Instead – Butter is actually the better choice, but go easy as it does contain a lot of saturated fat. An even better choice to drizzle on bread, substitute in recipes, and dress vegetables is olive oil flavored with your favorite herbs.

#16: Diet foods



In yet another sign of the unconscionable practices of many food manufacturers, products that are marketed as diet foods may actually be way worse for you. The problem is that once fat is removed from these foods, they don't taste very good. So the fat is replaced with a ton of artificial sweeteners and sodium. [Packaged foods in general](#) may also contain various addictive chemicals and are linked to an increased cancer risk. Once you factor in the risk of overeating based on a false understanding of the food's healthiness, diet products aren't a great choice overall.

Instead – Skip the packaged stuff and eat fresh, whole foods instead. Fruits and veggies can be purchased pre-cut and washed if your time is limited.

Choosing the best foods for you and your family can be quite overwhelming, especially in the face of lazy agricultural practices that care only about saving money, topped with deceitful marketing that misleads consumers about what they're getting. However, choosing food that lowers your risk of cancer can be boiled down to a couple basic principles. First, buy local and organic as much as you possibly can. And second, skip the packaged stuff (including soda) in favor of creative home cooked meals. It may take

more time in the moment, but it has the potential to extend your overall lifetime by many years.