

Weight, food, inactivity contribute to cancer risk

By Kathryn Reed

While the cause of many cancers is unknown, a person's lifestyle can be a large contributing factor.

That was the overriding message delivered by Lynn Norton, a registered dietician with Barton Health, during a Dec. 2 lecture at Lake Tahoe Community College.

"The majority of cancer is basically preventable," Norton said. "There are enough things in our lifestyle and with nutrition that we can do."

She cited several studies that underlined the need to pay attention to diet, body weight and exercise.

The risk of cancer increases, Norton said, with a high body mass index. This number is based on a person's height and weight. A healthy weight for a person who is 6-feet-tall is between 140 and 180 pounds, while someone 5-feet-6 should weigh between 115 and 150 pounds.

There are people who are overweight, and then those who fall into the obese category. In the United States people are increasingly in the worst category – obese. Thirty-four percent of the people in this country are considered obese. For those 19 and younger, the percentage is 17.

Obesity increases the risk of being diagnosed with the following cancers: esophagus, pancreatic, colorectal, breast, endometrial, kidney and gall bladder.



Garlic is said to ward off certain cancers. Photo/LTN file

Being active is going to help reduce one's weight, as well as reduce the risk of cancers like colon, post-menopausal breast and endometrial.

The recommendation is get 30 minutes of at least brisk walking every day, then work up to 60 minutes.

Another suggestion is to limit high calorie foods and sugary drinks. This can be attained by a diet derived mostly from plants. Norton pointed out how some veggies have more benefits than others, like garlic is a deterrent to colorectal cancer, carrots help prevent cervical cancer, and legumes ward off stomach and prostate cancers.

"Fibrous foods are dense and filling," Norton said. "Americans eat 10 to 15 grams of fiber a day and it should be 20 to 35 grams."

Red meat should be limited – in how often it is consumed and how much. Eighteen ounces a week is the recommendation.

When it comes to alcohol, Norton said it is considered a carcinogen. Two drinks a night for men, one for women, are the ideal amounts based on studies.

Sodium, while it's needed, is often consumed in alarming rates at restaurants and via packaged foods.

Norton cautioned people to be wary of supplements because they are unregulated. She stressed the need to do research to know what a safe level of them is.

She said the easiest way to begin making changes is to shop differently at the grocery store by putting more grains in the basket, along with vegetables. Norton suggests buying extra chicken or fish so there are leftovers for lunch instead of eating processed food midday. Shrink the size of the specialty coffee, order veggies on a pizza and no meat, put wine in a smaller glass. And treats – make them a treat, not a staple.