

# TOTAL WELLNESS FOR FIRE FIGHTERS



This factsheet was developed by the International Association of Fire Fighters and the Firefighter Cancer Support Network.

To maintain good health and decrease cancer risk throughout your career and into retirement, it is important to take personal responsibility for your health and wellness.

There are several ways to help lower risks of developing certain cancers and promote total wellness. Below are some recommendations that you can use while focusing on annual medical evaluations, nutrition, and fitness.

## ANNUAL MEDICAL EVALUATIONS

The importance of annual medical evaluations cannot be overstated — early cancer detection and early treatment are essential to increasing survival and improving outcomes.



Cancer screenings should be part of a NFPA 1582 annual medical exam, but never in lieu of. The NFPA 1582 annual medical is based on recommendations from established organizations, such as the American Cancer Society (ACS) and the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF), that include modifications to address increased risks of certain cancers in fire fighters. It is vital to get your annual medical exam to stay on top of health changes and advocate for your health.

If your department does not provide an annual medical, it is important to work with your primary care provider (PCP) to educate them on the occupational risks associated with firefighting to help protect your health. Available resources like the [Firefighter Medical Letter](#) and the [Provider's Guide to Firefighter Medical Evaluations](#) are designed to be taken to your PCP to inform them of the occupational risks you face as a fire fighter and can help you advocate for earlier screenings if you are experiencing changes to your health.

## NUTRITION

Nutrition is an essential part of overall health and wellness. Being overweight increases your risk of developing cancer as excess weight causes the body to make and circulate more estrogen and insulin, hormones that can stimulate cancer growth.<sup>1</sup>

Fire fighters should follow a balanced and heart-healthy diet to maintain a healthy weight. Below are foods to aim to include in your diet, as well as foods to limit consumption of:

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- Vegetables
  - Fruits
  - Leafy greens
  - Nuts
  - Beans
  - Whole grains
  - Lean proteins
  - High-quality fats
  - Water

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- Highly-processed foods
  - Sugar
  - Red and highly processed meats
  - White-flour carbohydrates
  - Fast food
  - Sweetened beverages

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## ON-SHIFT NUTRITION TIPS

It is not always easy to eat healthily while on shift or in between calls. But there are some ways you can promote healthier eating both on and off the job.

- Come prepared – bring food with you to the station, have pre-cooked meat, vegetables, fruits, and nuts to support eating healthy or to supplement crew meals.
- Select well balanced and healthy crew dinners – cook and eat dinner together. This can help keep each other accountable to choose healthy foods.
- Add variety to meals by including a side that has at least one vegetable.

## OFF-SHIFT NUTRITION TIPS

- Plan meals on your days off and have healthy food ready for when you return from a shift.
- Shop for quality ingredients such as whole or minimally processed foods.
- Prep food and pack healthy snacks the night before your shift

For more information and nutrition tips, visit [iaff.org/nutrition](http://iaff.org/nutrition).

## FITNESS

Being physically active helps reduce your risk of cancer by helping with physiological wellness, weight control, reduces inflammation, and improves immune system function.<sup>ii</sup>

The current [Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans](https://www.hhs.gov/physical-activity/guidelines-for-americans/) recommends adults:

- Exercise at least 150 minutes at moderate intensity, such as brisk walking, each week
- OR 75 minutes of vigorous intensity activity, such as jogging or running each week
- OR a combination of both moderate and vigorous activity each week
- At least 2 days of muscle-strengthening activity each week
- Limit sedentary behavior such as sitting, lying down, watching television, or other forms of screen-based entertainment

The IAFF Fit to Thrive (F2T) program is designed to help equip fire fighters with practical strategies and tactics to make exercise and physical activity accessible and meaningful. Learn more at [iaff.org/fit-to-thrive](http://iaff.org/fit-to-thrive).