

Cancer Risk Factors

Age is the biggest risk factor for getting cancer. However, the following risk factors affect a person's chances of getting cancer and dying from cancer:

- ✗ Cigarette smoking and other tobacco use
- ✗ Physical inactivity
- ✗ Poor diet
- ✗ Being overweight or obese
- ✗ Lack of access to care
- ✗ Environmental exposure (e.g., sun, radiation, secondhand smoke)
- ✗ Infectious agents (e.g., human papillomavirus, or HPV)

Smoking

According to the CDC and the National Cancer Institute, cigarette smoking is the leading risk factor for developing and dying from several diseases, including cancer. Nationally, smoking causes **123,800 deaths** from lung cancer, and **34,700 deaths** from other cancers each year. In Virginia, about 4,100 people will die from cancer yearly, with the majority of these cases being lung cancer.

Cigarette smoking is the leading risk factor for lung cancer, causing 87% of all lung cancer deaths. Men who smoke were **23 times** more likely to die from lung cancer than male non-smokers, and women who smoke were **13 times** more likely to die from lung cancer than female non-smokers.

Inhaling secondhand smoke can increase the risk of getting lung cancer by up to 30%. In the U.S., there were **3,000 lung cancer deaths** each year from secondhand smoke.

Smoking accounts for 30% of deaths from other cancers. Smoking increases the risk of getting these cancers:

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|----------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|
| * Lip, oral cavity | * Stomach | * Cervix |
| * Pharynx | * Pancreas | * Acute myeloid leukemia |
| * Larynx (voice box) | * Kidney | |
| * Esophagus | * Urinary bladder | |

According to the 2006 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, 19.3% of Virginians were current smokers. In 2005, 3.4% used smokeless tobacco (e.g., snuff, chew, spit tobacco). One in four adults (23%) say that smoking was allowed in their home, and 20% of adults work in indoor places where smoking is allowed.

Physical Inactivity, Poor Diet and Obesity

Physical inactivity, poor diet, and/or overweight/obesity were the second leading cause of preventable death in the U.S. According to the National Cancer Institute, 35% of cancer deaths are attributed to a diet high in saturated fat and low in fiber, fruits and vegetables. According to one study (Calle et al., 2003), overweight and obesity accounted for an estimated 14-20% of all cancer deaths combined.

According to a 2006 survey, 22% of Virginians had not exercised or been physically active in the past month (outside of their job), 37% were overweight and 25% were obese based on their reported height and weight.¹ A 2005 survey indicated that 74% ate less than five servings of fruits and vegetables per day.

¹ "Overweight" is defined as body mass index (BMI) ≥ 25 and < 30 ; "obese" is defined as BMI ≥ 30 .

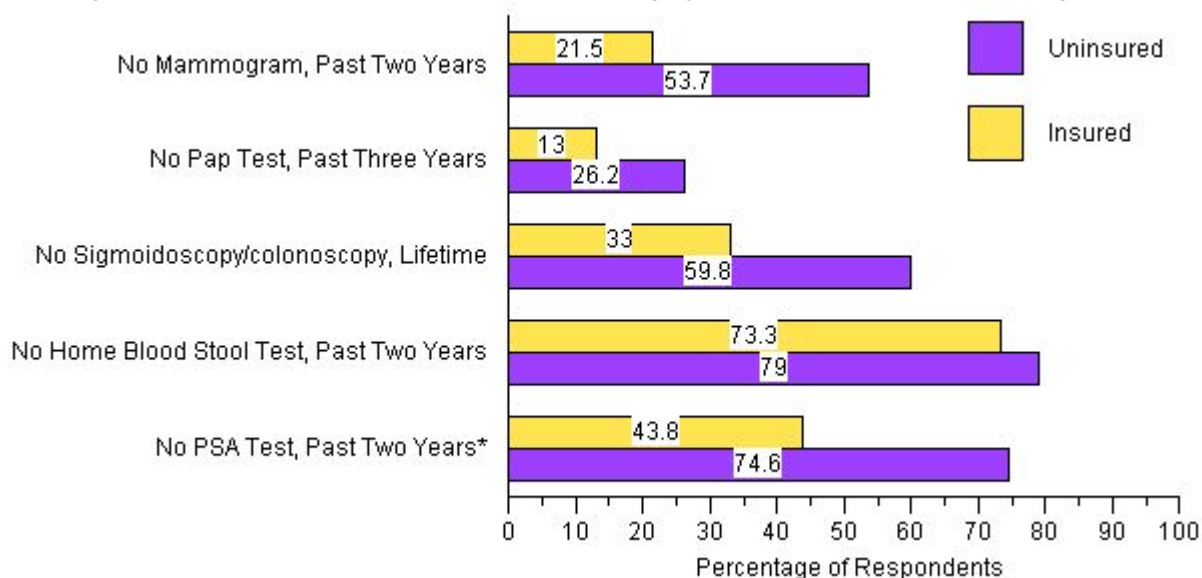
Access to Healthcare and Income

According to a 2007 study by the American Cancer Society, people without health insurance were almost twice as likely to die within five years of being diagnosed with cancer than their insured counterparts. Uninsured people were less likely to get screened for cancer, more likely to be diagnosed at an advanced stage, and their survival rate was lower.

According to the 2006 BRFSS, an estimated 593,000 adults in Virginia (10.3%) did not have health insurance coverage, 11% did not seek healthcare in the past 12 months because of cost, and 16% did not have a doctor whom they would consider their personal healthcare provider.

In the same survey, uninsured women were 2.5 times more likely to not get a mammogram and were twice as likely to not get a Pap test than women who were insured. Uninsured men were 70% more likely to not get a PSA test for prostate cancer screening than insured men. Uninsured adults were 81% more likely to not get a sigmoidoscopy or colonoscopy than insured adults (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Non-Participation in Cancer Screening by Health Insurance Status, Virginia, 2006



Source: Virginia Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System. Percentages are population-weighted.

- For information on risk behaviors in the U.S. and Virginia, go to the CDC BRFSS website (<http://www.cdc.gov/brfss/>).
- For more information about smoking and health, go to the VDH Tobacco Use Control Project website (<http://www.vahealth.org/cdpc/TUCP/>).

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