

Healthy Behaviors among New York State Cancer Survivors

Information for Action #2024-22 | Release Date: September 2024

A cancer survivor is a person who has cancer or who has had it in the past.¹ Over 1.1 million cancer survivors live in New York State.² Cancer survivors are at a greater risk of developing the same cancer or a new, unrelated cancer than people who have never had cancer. This may be due to treatment effects, genetics, or health behaviors like smoking, exercise, diet, and alcohol use that contributed to the first cancer. These challenges, coupled with physical, psychosocial, and financial burdens, underscore the importance of supporting cancer survivor wellness.³

The National Comprehensive Cancer Network, American Society of Clinical Oncology, and the American Cancer Society publish guidelines for healthy behaviors that recommend avoiding smoking, limiting alcohol consumption, increasing physical activity, and maintaining a healthy body weight to ease negative effects of treatment, reduce the risk of comorbidities, and lower cancer recurrence and death among cancer survivors.⁴

Unfortunately, disparities in healthy behaviors persist, highlighting the need for education and to address the conditions in which people grow, work, live and age. By improving these social determinants of health, all cancer survivors can be empowered to make healthy choices and thrive beyond their diagnosis.

Public Health Opportunity

To support cancer survivors and all New Yorkers, **health care providers** can:

- Educate cancer survivors on healthy behaviors like quitting smoking, a balanced diet, exercise, and limiting alcohol while being mindful of the socioeconomic and cultural factors that may impact a cancer survivor's ability to adopt healthy behaviors.
- Ensure cancer survivors have access to support services such as nutrition counseling, smoking cessation programs, and support groups.

To support cancer survivors and all New Yorkers, **state and local public health professionals** can:

- Develop policies, systems, and environments that support healthy food choices, safe and accessible physical activity opportunities, and reduced availability and marketing of alcohol and tobacco products in communities.
- Support evidence-based and policy-driven approaches to motivate cancer survivors who use tobacco to quit.
- Advocate for increased funding for cancer prevention and survivorship programs, improving access to healthcare services, and implementing policies to promote healthy lifestyles.

For more information, please send an e-mail to BCDER@health.ny.gov with IFA #2024-22 in the subject line. To access other Information for Action reports, visit the [NYSDOH public website](https://www.ny.gov).

1. New York State Department of Health. (2021). *Cancer Survivorship*. Retrieved October 25, 2023, from <https://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/cancer/survivorship/index.htm>.
2. New York State Cancer Registry. (2020). *Estimated Cancer Prevalence, New York State*. Retrieved October 25, 2023, from <https://www.health.ny.gov/statistics/cancer/registry/>.
3. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2023). *Cancer Survivors: Information for Health Care Providers*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved October 25, 2023, from <https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/survivors/health-care-providers/index.htm>.
4. Hannah Arem, Scherezade K. Mama, Xuejing Duan, Julia H. Rowland, Keith M. Bellizzi, Diane K. Ehlers. *Prevalence of Healthy Behaviors among Cancer Survivors in the United States: How Far Have We Come?* *Cancer Epidemiol Biomarkers Prev* 1 June 2020; 29 (6): 1179–1187.

BETWEEN 2018-2021, AMONG NEW YORK STATE CANCER SURVIVORS

90.3% report not drinking excessively.

88.8% report not currently smoking.

74.1% report eating fruits or vegetables daily.

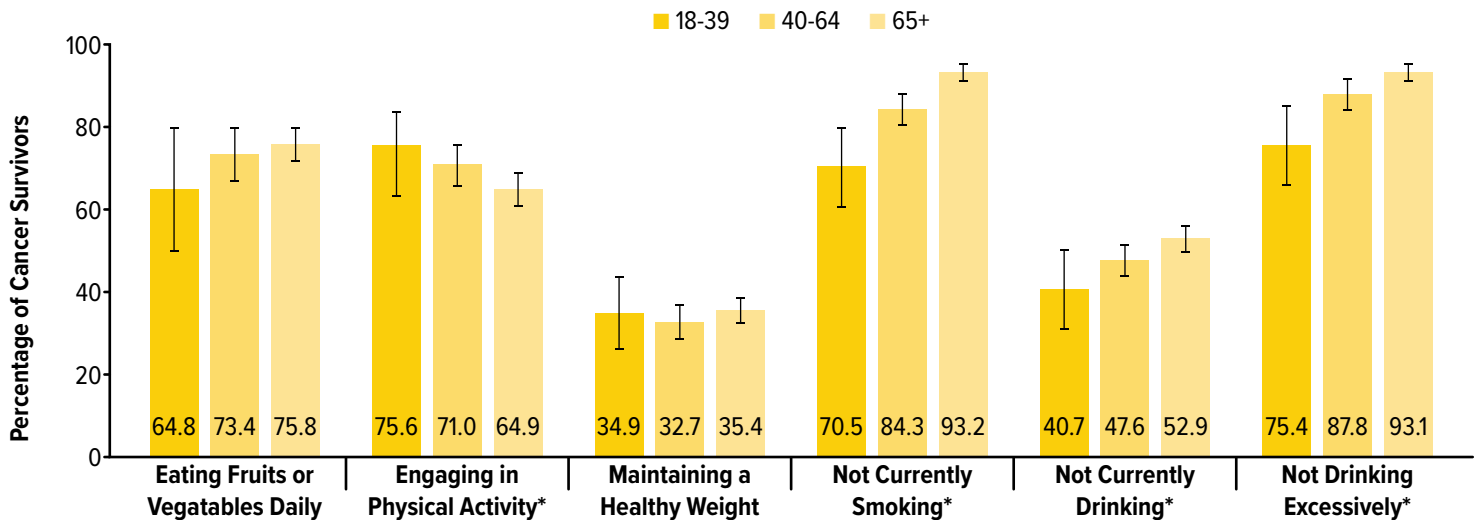
67.7% report engaging in physical activity.

50.2% report not currently drinking.

34.5% report maintaining a healthy weight.

Note: Fruit and vegetable consumption questions were not asked in the 2019 and 2020 surveys, thus estimates of cancer survivors reporting fruit and vegetable consumption are presented for years 2018 and 2021 combined, only. A cancer survivor is a respondent who indicated a doctor, nurse, or other health professional ever told them that they had any types of cancer (other than skin cancer). Engaging in physical activity is a respondent who reported participating in any physical activities or exercises (other than one's regular job) such as running, calisthenics, golf, gardening, or walking for exercise during the past 30 days. Maintaining a healthy weight is a respondent who reported a body mass index less than 25 kg/m² (e.g., not being overweight or not having obesity). Not currently smoking is a respondent who did not report smoking at least 100 cigarettes in their lifetime and does not currently smoke on at least some days. Not currently drinking is a respondent who did not report having at least one drink of any alcoholic beverage during the past 30 days. Not drinking excessively is a respondent who did not report binge drinking (consuming 4 or more drinks for women and 5 or more drinks for men on a single occasion) or heavy drinking (consuming 8 or more drinks per week for women and 15 or more drinks per week for men).

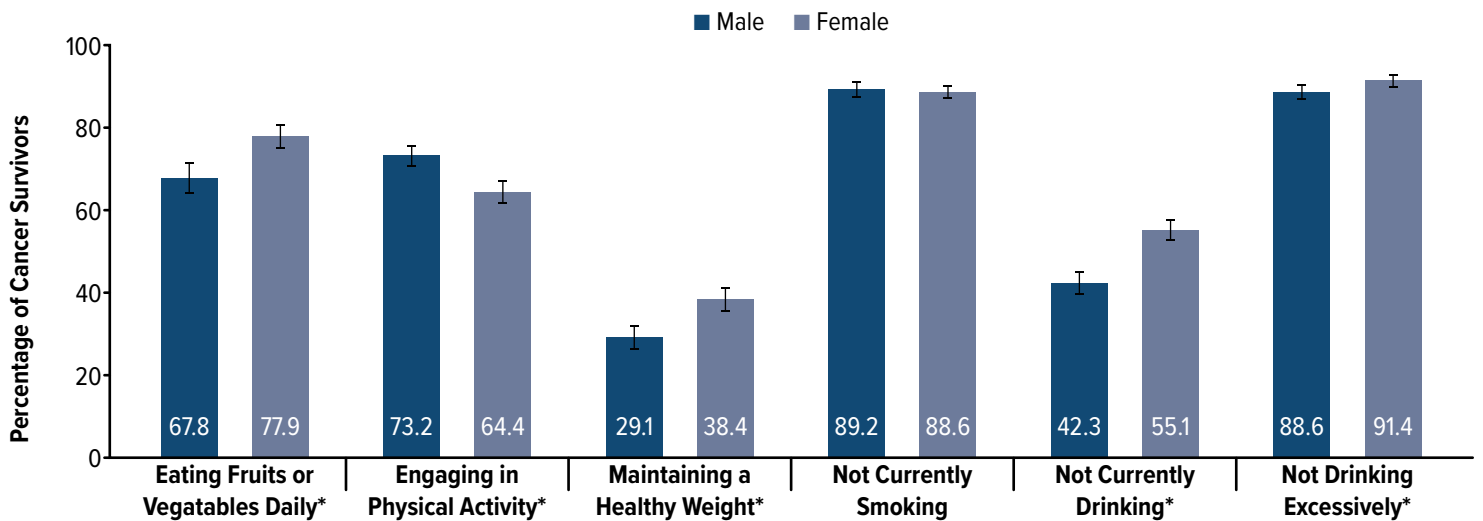
Healthy Behaviors among Cancer Survivors by Age, Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System 2018-2021



*Indicates statistically significant difference between groups based on $p < .05$.

- The percentage of cancer survivors who reported practicing healthy behaviors increased with increasing age for not currently smoking, not currently drinking alcohol, and not drinking alcohol excessively but decreased with age for engaging in physical activity.
- Only one in three cancer survivors, regardless of age, reported maintaining a healthy weight.

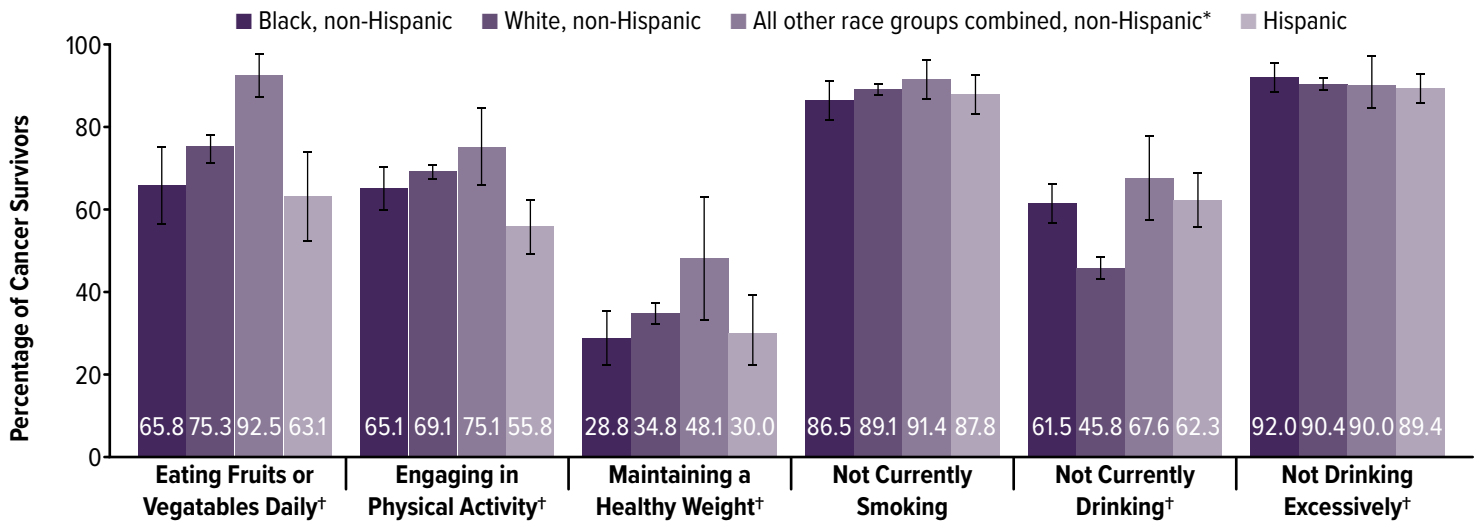
Healthy Behaviors among Cancer Survivors by Sex, Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System 2018-2021



*Indicates statistically significant difference between groups based on $p < .05$.

- Female cancer survivors were more likely to report eating fruits or vegetables daily, maintaining a healthy weight, not currently drinking alcohol, and not drinking alcohol excessively.
- Male cancer survivors were more likely to report engaging in physical activity.

Healthy Behaviors among Cancer Survivors by Race and Ethnicity, Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System 2018-2021



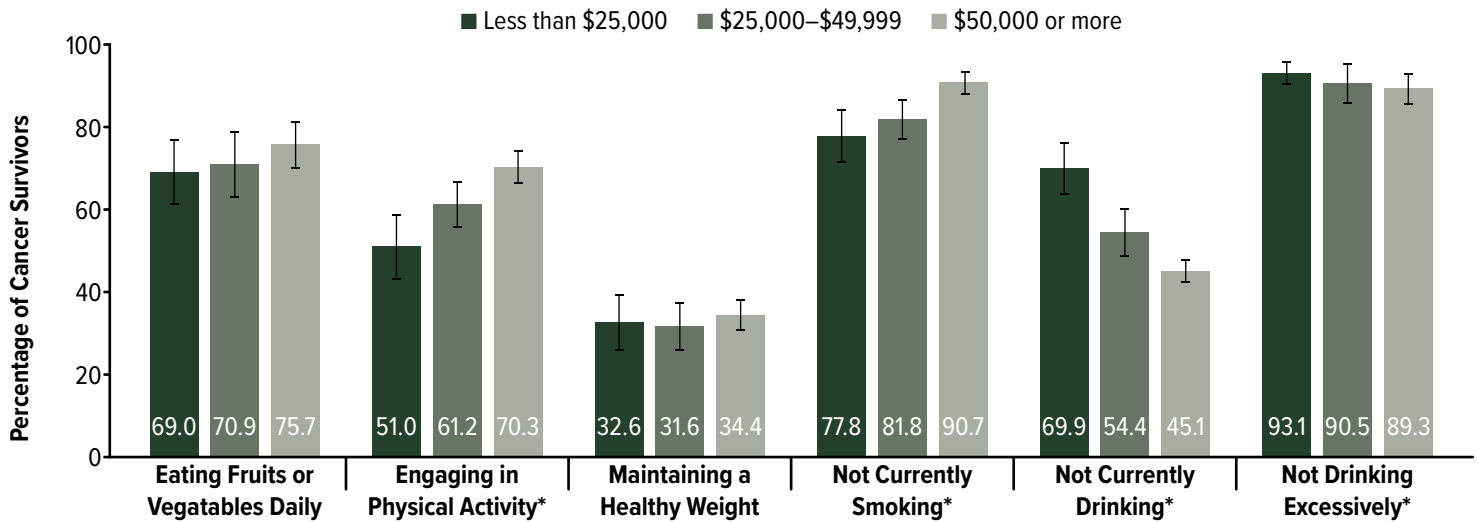
*Includes Asian, American Indian, Alaskan Native, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, other race, or multiracial, non-Hispanic.

Due to low sample size, they were included in an aggregated race and ethnicity category.

†Indicates statistically significant difference between groups based on $p < .05$.

- Cancer survivors who identify as Asian, American Indian, Alaskan Native, Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, multiracial, or another race and non-Hispanic were more likely to report eating fruits or vegetables daily, engaging in physical activity, maintaining a healthy weight, and not currently drinking alcohol.
- Cancer survivors who identify as non-Hispanic Black or Hispanic were the least likely to report eating fruits or vegetables daily, engaging in physical activity, and maintaining a healthy weight.
- Cancer survivors who identify as non-Hispanic White were the least likely to report not currently drinking alcohol.

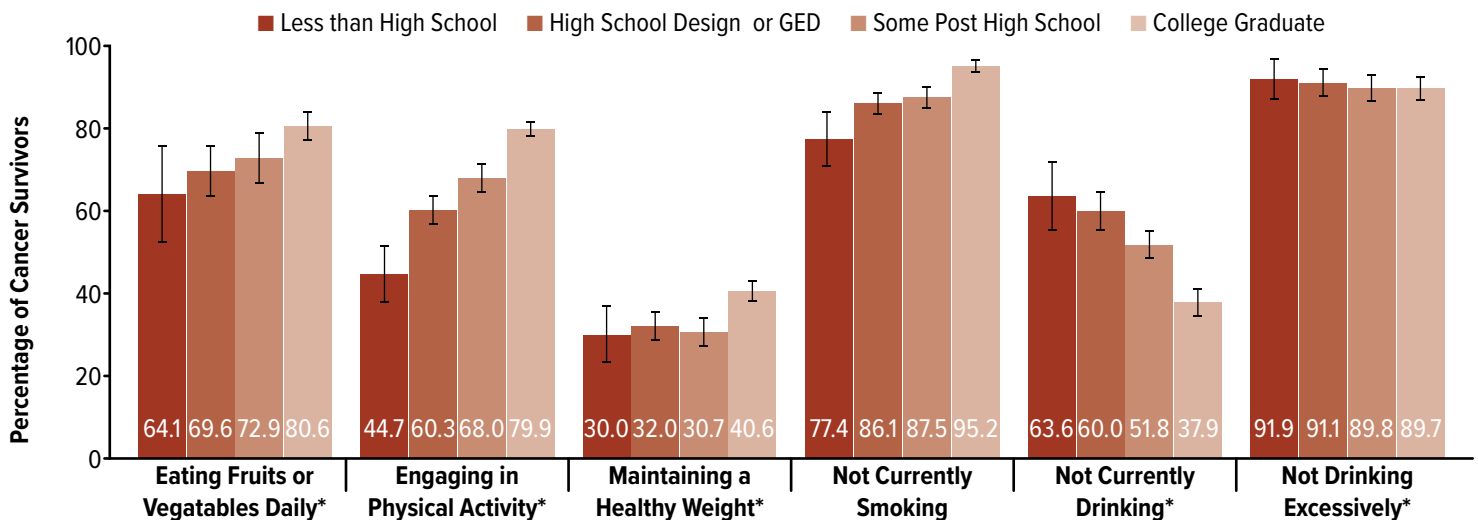
Healthy Behaviors among Cancer Survivors by Income, Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System 2018-2021



*Indicates statistically significant difference between groups based on $p < .05$.

- The percentage of cancer survivors who reported practicing healthy behaviors increased with higher incomes for engaging in physical activity and not currently smoking.
- In contrast, cancer survivors with higher incomes were less likely to report not currently drinking alcohol and not drinking alcohol excessively.
- Only one in three cancer survivors, regardless of income, reported maintaining a healthy weight.

Healthy Behaviors among Cancer Survivors by Education, Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System 2018-2021



*Indicates statistically significant difference between groups based on $p < .05$.

- The percentage of cancer survivors who reported practicing healthy behaviors increased with higher levels of education for eating fruits or vegetables daily, engaging in physical activity, and not currently smoking.
- In contrast, cancer survivors with higher levels of education were less likely to report not currently drinking alcohol.
- Cancer survivors with a college degree were more likely to report maintaining a healthy weight than all other education levels.