

Cancer

World Cancer Day
February 4



“Cancer is a leading cause of death worldwide, accounting for 8.2 million deaths in 2012.”

World Health Organization, November 2014

What is cancer?

Cancer is a serious condition in which cells of the body grow in an uncontrolled way. The disease – which is also sometimes called *tumour*, *neoplasm* or *malignancy* – can affect almost any part of the body. Cancer is not a single disease – it is a term for a group of diseases. There are more than 200 types, each with its own name and treatment.

Though cancer can be treated*, it is still a leading cause of death worldwide. The cancers which most commonly kill are lung, stomach, liver, colo-rectal, breast and oesophageal. The World Health Organization expects that annual cancer cases will rise from 14 million in 2012 to 22 within the next 2 decades. About 30% of all cancer cases could have been prevented by lifestyle and vaccination choices.

What causes cancer?

The exact cause is not known. However, we do know that certain agents called *carcinogens* damage cells and may cause cancer. Ageing and genetic factors also play a part. Risk goes up as a person gets older, and some cancers run in families.

Some known carcinogens include:

- Tobacco smoke – this is the single leading risk factor for cancer
- Ultraviolet radiation, which comes from the sun as well as other sources
- Asbestos
- Biological agents, such as infections with certain viruses, bacteria or parasites

How can some cancers be prevented?

More than 30% of all cancer cases could have been prevented!

- Avoid tobacco and its smoke
- Maintain a healthy weight; being overweight or obese increases risk
- Eat a healthy diet, particularly fruit and vegetables; reduce intake of processed foods
- Get physically active
- Limit alcohol intake
- Limit your exposure to urban air pollution and indoor smoke from household use of solid fuels
- Consider hepatitis B vaccination, which prevents most liver cancers
- Women should consider HPV vaccination, which prevents most cervical cancers



Cancer is treatable

Treatment is most effective if cancer is detected early. Learn the early signs. Seek prompt medical attention for symptoms such as:

- Lumps
- Sores that don't heal
- Persistent indigestion
- Persistent coughing
- Change in bowel habits
- Abnormal bleeding
- Unexplained weight loss

Each type of cancer has its own treatment.

* Treatment aims to cure, prolong life and improve quality of life for patients.

Speak to your doctor about the options for cancer screening.

Disclaimer: This leaflet has been developed for educational purposes only. It is not a substitute for professional medical advice. Should you have questions or concerns about any topic described here, please consult your medical professional.

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