

## Key issues

# Prevention and risk reduction



At least one third of cancers are preventable giving us every reason to champion healthy choices and prevention strategies for all, so that we have the best chance to prevent and reduce our cancer risks.

### Choosing your health

Not every type of cancer is preventable but we do know we can prevent many cancers through lifestyle choices alone. According to the World Health Organization, at least **one third of common cancers are preventable**<sup>1</sup> through a healthy diet, maintaining a healthy weight and being physically active.

#### Smoking

Tobacco use is the single largest preventable cause of cancer and stopping smoking is one of the best things we can do to reduce our risk of cancer. Use of tobacco has been found to cause around 15 different types of cancer including oral cancers, lung, liver, stomach, bowel and ovarian cancers, as well as some types of leukaemia (cancers of the blood)<sup>2</sup>.

Quitting at any age can make huge a difference, increasing your life expectancy and improving quality of life<sup>3</sup>.

#### Fast fact:

**Smoking is linked to 71%<sup>4</sup> of lung cancer deaths, and accounts for at least 22% of all cancer deaths<sup>5</sup>.**

#### Alcohol

Alcohol is strongly linked with an increased risk of several cancers. By reducing and limiting how much you drink, you can reduce your risk of cancers of the mouth, pharynx, larynx, oesophagus, bowel and breast, and may also reduce the risk of liver and bowel cancers.

#### Physical activity

Maintaining a healthy weight and making physical activity part of your everyday life can help reduce your risk of ten cancers, which include bowel, breast, uterine, ovarian, pancreatic, oesophagus, kidney, liver, advanced prostate and gallbladder cancers<sup>6,7</sup>.

#### Ultraviolet radiation

No matter where you live or your skin tone, moderate your exposure to ultraviolet radiation from the sun and avoid tanning beds and solariums to help reduce your risk of skin cancer<sup>6</sup>. Staying under the shade, covering up your skin and avoiding prolonged periods of exposure to the sun are some ways to help protect yourself.

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### Workplace hazards

Some people risk being exposed to a cancer-causing substance because of the work that they do. For example, workers in the chemical dye industry have been found to have a higher incidence than normal of bladder cancer. Asbestos is a well-known workplace cause of cancer - particularly a cancer called mesothelioma, which most commonly affects the covering of the lungs. In this case, asbestos isn't just present in workplaces but can also be found in older homes and buildings.

### Get vaccinated

Chronic infections (commonly caused by viruses) are estimated to cause approximately 16% of all cancers globally. Some of the most common forms of cancers such as liver, cervical and stomach cancers are associated with infections with the hepatitis B virus (HBV), the human papillomavirus (HPV), and the bacterium *Helicobacter pylori* virus (H. pylori), respectively.

Today, there are safe and effective vaccines against HBV and HPV, which can help to protect against the infection-related cancers of liver and cervical cancers.

### What can we do?

- As **individuals** we can take responsibility for our health, including getting vaccinated and reminding others to get vaccinated, maintaining a healthy and active lifestyle, avoiding alcohol, tobacco and excessive/prolonged sun exposure
- **Governments and policy leaders** can implement vaccination programmes which prevent infections that cause cervical and liver cancer, regulate solariums and tanning salons, and ban the mining and export of asbestos
- **Schools** can be champions of healthy behaviours among children, staff, parents, families and the wider community by cultivating an environment that supports good nutrition and physical activity, as well as providing information on other cancer risk factors
- **Workplaces and employers** can implement measures in the workplace that will motivate and sustain healthy habits throughout a person's everyday life and put in place policies to prevent occupational exposure to cancer-causing agents, such as asbestos and other workplace carcinogens, as well as fostering physical activity, healthy nutrition and creating smoke-free spaces.
- **Cities and communities** can take the lead in creating a quality urban environment that promotes and protects the health and wellbeing of its citizens.

1. World Health Organization, Cancer, <http://www.who.int/cancer/en/>
2. Cancer Research UK, How smoking causes cancer, <https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/causes-of-cancer/smoking-and-cancer/how-smoking-causes-cancer>
3. Jha P, Peto R. (2011). Global Effects of Smoking, of Quitting, and of Taxing Tobacco. *N Engl J Med.* 370:60-8.
4. World Health Organization, Global Report: Mortality Attributable to Tobacco, [http://www.who.int/tobacco/publications/surveillance/fact\\_sheet\\_mortality\\_report.pdf](http://www.who.int/tobacco/publications/surveillance/fact_sheet_mortality_report.pdf)
5. GBD 2015 Risk Factors Collaborators. Global, regional, and national comparative risk assessment of 79 behavioural, environmental and occupational, and metabolic risks or clusters of risks, 1990-2015: a systematic analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study 2015. *Lancet.* 2016 Oct; 388 (10053):1659-1724.
6. World Cancer Research Fund International/American Institute for Cancer Research. Continuous Update Project. <http://www.wcrf.org/int/cancer-facts-figures/link-between-lifestyle-cancer-risk/cancers-linked-greater-body-fatness>
7. World Cancer Research Fund International/American Institute for Cancer Research. Continuous Update Project Reports. <http://www.wcrf.org/int/research-we-fund/continuous-update-project-findings-reports>
8. SunSmart UV and sun protection. <http://www.sunsmart.com.au/uv-sun-protection>