

# Cancer



**“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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