

Lifestyle Choices that affect the risk of cancer

During the month of February, we are looking at various aspects of cancer awareness. It is said that knowledge is power. We agree, but would like to add that "Applied" knowledge is power! When you know what you are dealing with, then you can make more sound choices and judgements.

For this purpose, we would like to shed some light on certain lifestyle choices, which can either reduce or increase the risk of developing cancer.

Can cancer be prevented? Decades of research have shown that a person's chances of getting cancer depends on a mix of their genes and their environment, but also certain aspects of their lives, many of which they can control.

Information is power

Rather than focus on short-term behaviour changes, healthy living is about long-term lifestyle tweaks that can really make a difference. Regularly taking the stairs rather than using the lift, drinking a couple fewer beers or wines every week, eating a little more fruit, etc.

Incorporating a series of such healthy behaviours into your daily life can make a significant difference to your future risk of cancer.

Below are a few well-known lifestyle risk factors for the development of cancer:

- **Smoking**

- smoking can increase the risk for cancer, especially cancers of the head, neck and lung.

- **Overweight**

- obesity and being overweight can increase cancer risk, especially breast cancer.

- **Poor intake of fruit and vegetables**

- At least 5 portions of fruit and vegetables per day is recommended to prevent cancer.

- **Excessive alcohol intake**

- you don't have to cut out alcohol completely to reduce the risk of cancer – the more you cut down, the more you can reduce the risk. You could try tracking your drinking for a few weeks, to see how much alcohol you really drink – many people underestimate the amount.

- **Excessive sunlight exposure and sunbeds**

- getting too much exposure to UV light, whether from the sun or sunbeds, is the main cause of skin cancers. Rates of malignant melanoma, the most serious form of skin cancer, are rising fast.

- **Excessive intake of red and processed meat**

- red meat is any fresh, minced or frozen beef, pork, lamb or veal. Processed meat means anything that's been preserved (apart from by freezing) – so it includes salami, bacon, ham and sausages. It's a good idea to limit your intake to only a couple of times a week. Excessive intake of red meat has especially been shown to increase the risk of breast, colon and prostate cancers.

- **Poor fibre intake**

- eating a high-fibre diet can reduce the risk of bowel cancer.

- **Inadequate physical activity**

- being active not only helps you keep a healthy weight, but also reduces cancer risk by itself. But you don't have to slog it out in the gym for hours a day – just 30 minutes of moderate activity on 5 days a week gives you the benefit. And even small bits of activity throughout the day add up.