

Lifestyle Factors Influence Cancer Risk

Cancer can cause many people to feel out of control. They think getting cancer is the luck of the draw; some will get it, some won't. In reality, though, research backs up what doctors have been saying for some time: people have more control over cancer than they think.

Lifestyle influences about a third of cancers in the United States. What we eat, if we get regular exercise and if we see the doctor regularly for recommended screenings makes an impact on our overall health and risk for cancer.

A recent report from the World Cancer Research Fund and the American Institute for Cancer Research says that living a healthy lifestyle by eating right and exercising regularly may prevent:

- 38% of breast cancers
- 45% of colorectal cancers
- 36% of lung cancers
- 39% of pancreatic cancers
- 47% of stomach cancers
- 69% of esophageal cancers
- 63% of cancers of the mouth, pharynx or larynx
- 70% of endometrial cancers
- 24% of kidney cancers
- 21% of gall bladder cancers
- 15% of liver cancers
- 11% of prostate cancers

In addition to these cancers, the report goes on to say that diet, exercise and limited body fat could prevent 24% of all cancers. These findings don't count cancers that could be prevented by not smoking.

"This is one of the most empowering studies that reinforce what we, as doctors, have been saying for a long time. Maintaining a healthy lifestyle is important for overall health," said Henry Goolsby, MD, oncologist with Lake Charles Medical and Surgical Clinic. "Seeing your family doctor or internist regularly and getting the recommended screenings matters. People have more control over cancer risk than they think."

Dr. Goolsby said there have been tremendous advances in the treatment of cancer, especially when detected early. "But, people have to see their doctor to get screened," he said.

The American Cancer Society reports that, on average, nationwide, one in three people will get cancer at some point in their lives. That's why regular screenings are critical. "When cancer is discovered early, we have a much higher chance in beating it," said Dr. Goolsby.

Making health a higher priority is one of the goals of the American Cancer Society. Tisha McKinney, Communications Director said, "Many people don't think about their health until there is a problem. We need to change that mindset. Everyday choices add up and that's what the framework of our health is built upon. What we eat, how often we exercise, if we choose to

smoke, when we decide to see a doctor; these are the things related to cancer risk that we can control.”

The following screenings are recommended by the American Cancer Society:

Female specific cancers:

- yearly mammogram starting at age 40
- clinical breast exam by a physician every 3 years
- pelvic exam every year. If tests come back normal for three years in a row for women over 30, a screening every two or three years is within guidelines.

Colorectal screening for both men and women should begin after age 50.

Prostate cancer screening for men should begin after age 50. For men at high risk, including African American men and those with a family history should begin screening at age 45.

Dr. Goolsby said, “The main message I’d like people to understand is that it’s critical to their good health that they get screened, get active, and live a healthy lifestyle. We’re talking about reducing cancer risk. It’s worth it.”