



Understanding Cancer

Did You Know?

One-third of all cancer deaths are preventable, with prevention offering the most cost-effective long-term strategy for its control. Regular physical activity and the maintenance of a healthy body weight, along with a healthy diet, can also considerably reduce cancer risk.

The term *cancer*, also known as a malignant tumor, describes the fast formation of abnormal cells within the body. While healthy cells usually replace themselves at a normal rate, cancer cells tend to grow beyond their typical boundaries in the body by replicating at unusually high rates. Cancer starts out as a single cell that turns into an abnormal cell, possibly through interactions between genetics and the environment. Cancer can affect any part of the body and any number of important organ systems. Currently there is no cure for cancer, though many treatment possibilities are being explored. Common treatment options include medicine, chemotherapy, radiation therapy, surgery, dietary changes, or a combination of the above.

Risk Factors for Cancer

Though the exact cause of cancer is not yet known, several possible risk factors for cancer have been identified. These risk factors may act alone or together to contribute to the *occurrence* of cancer- though they may not necessarily be the *cause* of cancer. Lifestyle characteristics that may contribute to cancer risk, such as diet, physical activity, and tobacco use, are usually the most manageable.

These lifestyle risk factors may increase the risk of cancer:

- Being overweight or obese
- Consuming a diet high in processed foods
- Lacking adequate physical activity
- Using tobacco products
- Drinking more alcohol than is recommended
- Having infections such as hepatitis and human papilloma virus-HPV
- Being exposed to environmental pollution in air, water, and soil or occupational carcinogens such as asbestos
- Being exposed to high levels of radiation (ultra violet-UV light, radon gas)

Knowing and avoiding cancer risk factors may help prevent its occurrence and help speed recovery during treatment.