



Minimising your risk of cancer - World Cancer Day

by Charmaine Gauci

Cancer is a leading cause of death around the world. WHO estimated that 84 million people will die of cancer between 2005 and 2015 (without intervention). Each year on 4 February, WHO supports the International Union Against Cancer to promote ways to ease the global burden of cancer. Obviously, preventing cancer and raising quality of life for cancer patients are recurring themes. Local data from 1996-2008 show that there are increasing trends in incidence when all cancers are included together, for both genders. There were 401.2 new cases per 100,000 people during 2008. However the overall age-standardised-rate remains below the European average rate.

The commonest cancer in females are breast and in males colorectal cancer and prostate cancer. Locally, there were 837 deaths from these cancers in 2009. It has been estimated that more than 30% of cancer deaths can be prevented. Many aspects of general health can be improved, and certain cancers avoided, if one adopts a healthier lifestyle.

Key points which one should communicate to patients include:

1. Do not smoke. Smoking is the largest single cause of premature death;

2. Keep a healthy weight;
3. Undertake brisk, physical activity every day;
4. Make sure you consume a variety of fruit and vegetables eating at least five servings daily. You need to reduce intake of animal fat;
5. If you drink alcohol, whether beer, wine or spirits, moderate your consumption to a minimum;
6. Care must be taken to avoid excessive sun exposure. It is specifically important to protect children and adolescents. For individuals who have a tendency to burn in the sun active protective measures must be taken throughout life;
7. Apply strictly regulations aimed at preventing any exposure to known cancer-causing substances. Follow all health and safety instructions on substances which may cause cancer.

The Ministry for Health, the Elderly and Community Care will shortly be launching the National Cancer Plan 2011-2015. The overarching purpose of this plan is to reduce incidence, prolong survival and ensure the best quality of life possible for cancer patients.

Material to help you promote well being and prevention of illness can be obtained from the Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Directorate by calling on 23266000.

Minimising Your Risk of Cancer

You can significantly improve your health and prevent certain cancers if you choose a healthier lifestyle. Here are a few tips that may guide you in making these choices the easier options for you and your loved ones.

- 1**

Do not smoke. Smoking is the largest single cause of premature death.

If you still smoke, do your best to quit as quickly as possible. You will start feeling better no matter how long you have been smoking. If you continue to smoke, it is important not to smoke in the presence of others especially children and pregnant mothers. Maltese laws prohibit smoking in public places so you would be breaking the law if you do.

For help on quitting, you may:

 - ▶ call on 8007 3333 or 2326 6116/000
 - ▶ join a Smoking Cessation Clinic by calling 2326 6000 for an application form

- 2**

Keep a healthy weight.

Do your utmost to maintain a healthy weight by eating healthily and including physical activity in your daily life. It is best to maintain a Body Mass Index (BMI) in the range of 18.5 to 25 kg/m². People who are overweight or obese should aim to reduce their BMI to below 25 kg/m².

For help on maintaining a healthy weight:

 - ▶ call on 2326 6118/000
 - ▶ join a Weight Management Course by calling 2326 6000 for an application form

- 3**

Undertake some brisk, physical activity every day.

The uptake of exercise should ideally start early in life. However, it is also beneficial to start being active later in life if a healthy lifestyle is adopted. So think of an activity that you really enjoy doing and start doing it.

For help on how to best be physically active:

 - ▶ call on 2326 6118/000
 - ▶ join an Aerobics Class by calling 2326 6000 for an application form

- 4**

Make sure you consume a variety of fruit and vegetables eating at least five servings daily. You need to reduce intake of animal fat.

Fruits and vegetables should be taken with each meal whenever possible, and systematically replace snacks in between meals. It is recommended that you consume at least 5 portions a day (minimum 400 grams/day, i.e. 2 pieces of fruit and 200 grams of vegetables) and which could lead to a reduction in cancer risk.

- 5**

If you drink alcohol, whether beer, wine or spirits, moderate your consumption to a minimum.

Alcohol affects different people differently as to their social interactions, so the best advice is to drink in moderation if you want to. Health wise, it presents risk of various cancers and should be consumed cautiously if at all.

- 6**

Care must be taken to avoid excessive sun exposure. It is specifically important to protect children and adolescents. For individuals who have a tendency to burn in the sun active protective measures must be taken throughout life.

Follow these guidelines and you will be able to enjoy the sun without harming your skin:

 - ▶ Avoid exposure to the sun between 11.00am and 3.00pm
 - ▶ Wear light coloured cotton clothing when going in the sun
 - ▶ Apply sun screen having a high protection factor
 - ▶ Wear a hat and sunglasses
 - ▶ Avoid exposure to ultraviolet radiation such as UV beds which contribute to skin ageing process and may cause skin cancer

- 7**

Apply strictly regulations aimed at preventing any exposure to known cancer-causing substances. Follow all health and safety instructions on substances which may cause cancer.

Occupational Health & Safety regulations control the use or exposure to carcinogenic substances. These regulations must be adhered to at all times.

Every individual must protect their own health and the health of others, by paying attention to the presence of carcinogenic pollutants and follow instructions and regulations aimed at mitigating or preventing exposure to carcinogens.

- 8**

Breast cancer

All women should care for their breasts by:

 - ▶ self-examining their breasts on a monthly basis from the age of 18 years
 - ▶ having their breasts clinically examined annually by a health care professional from the age of 30
 - ▶ having a mammogram as advised by their doctor

The National Breast Screening Programme invites women aged 50 to 59, every 3 years to be screened for breast cancer. When you receive the invitation, to accept it, and come to the Lascaris Screening Centre for a mammogram. It is free of charge and can save your life!

Note: The Health Promotion Unit within the Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Directorate is open Mondays to Fridays 7.30am to 3.30pm. The courses mentioned are all free of charge.

Information adopted from the European Code Against Cancer 2003

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