

Can cancer be prevented?

Many people believe that getting cancer is purely down to genes, fate or bad luck. But through scientific research, we know that our risk actually depends on a combination of our genes, our environment and aspects of our lives, many of which we can control.

Cancer is caused by damage to our DNA, the chemical instructions that tell our cells what to do. Things in our environment, such as UV rays, or our lifestyle, such as the cancer-causing chemicals in tobacco, can damage our DNA. This damage builds up over time. If a cell develops too much damage to its DNA it can start to multiply out of control – this is how cancer starts.

Family history and inherited genes

Some people inherit damaged DNA from their parents, which can give them a higher risk of certain cancers. For example the BRCA genes are linked with breast, ovarian, prostate and other cancers. But the proportion of cancers caused by inherited faulty genes is small.

How many cancers could be prevented?

In the UK, more than 1 in 2 people will develop cancer at some point in their lives. Every year, more than 331,000 people are diagnosed with the disease. But experts estimate that more than 4 in 10 cancer cases could be prevented by lifestyle changes, such as:

- not smoking
- keeping a healthy bodyweight
- cutting back on alcohol
- eating a healthy, balanced diet
- keeping active
- avoiding certain infections (such as HPV)
- enjoying the sun safely
- occupation (avoiding cancer risks in the workplace)

Surveys of the population have shown that people aren't necessarily aware that all of these things are linked to cancer. For example, the Cancer Research UK funded Perceptions of Risk Survey in 2008 found that only 3% of the people polled knew that being overweight or obese could increase their risk of cancer.

Credits to:

<http://www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/causes-of-cancer/can-cancer-be-prevented>