



North East London
Cancer Alliance

UNDERSTANDING CANCER AND REDUCING ITS RISKS

THE PURPOSE OF THIS BROCHURE

To raise awareness about the realities of cancer, to gain some basic knowledge, and above all, to learn how to reduce risks through a healthy lifestyle. Above all, to encourage the reader to participate in the screening programs currently being offered free of charge by the NHS to those registered with a GP.

OUTLINE

- General information about the human body;
- What is CANCER?
- The 5 most common cancers in the UK;
- Risk factors that expose you to cancer;
- Signs and symptoms;
- Cancer diagnosis;
- Cancer treatments;
- Prevention;
- SCREENING PROGRAMS available on the NHS;
- Where to find advice;

GENERAL INFORMATION

The human body is not a single unit, but a complex structural whole composed of hundreds of billions of **CELLS** grouped into **TISSUES**, **ORGANS**, and **SYSTEMS**, which we define below:

CELL:

This is the smallest basic structure of the body's organs and tissues. Its size is measured in millimicrons. They receive strict, timely signals from the body for their growth and division to generate new cells to replace those that have aged. This ensures the body's growth, maintenance, and defence.

TISSUE:

This is a collection of related, but not always identical, cells connected together to perform a specific function. There are four different tissues:

- Epithelia,
- Connective tissue,
- Muscle tissue,
- Nervous tissue.

ORGAN:

This is a clearly defined part of a living being's body that performs specific functions; examples include the eye and the heart.

SYSTEM:

Is a group of organs and tissues working together to perform one or more common functions in the body, to ensure growth, survival, and reproduction. The different systems are:

1. The nervous system;
2. The respiratory system;
3. The circulatory system (or cardiovascular system);
4. The digestive system;
5. The urinary system;
6. The endocrine system;
7. The reproductive system;
8. The muscular system;
9. The skeletal system;
10. The lymphatic system;
11. The integumentary system.

WHAT IS CANCER?

It is a group of cells disconnected from the signals that control normal biological functioning, which begin to divide and grow abnormally, in an uncontrolled manner, until they form a mass called a **TUMOR**.

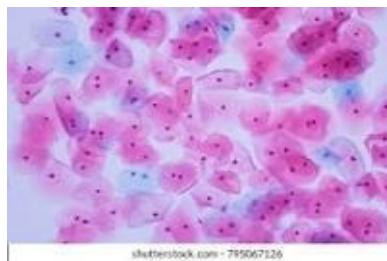
These cells are capable of invading and killing healthy cells in surrounding areas, neighbouring or distant organs.

Given the extreme structural complexity of the human body, cancer can develop anywhere and at any time!

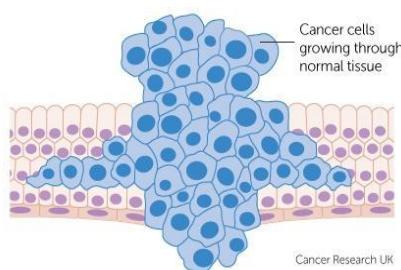
However, not all tumours are cancerous; some are **benign**.

Cancer grows as cells multiply continuously and without biological control.

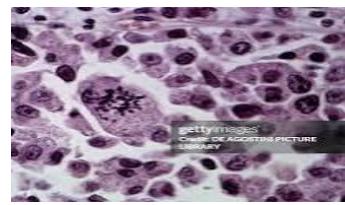
Microscope:



shutterstock.com - 785067126



Cancer Research UK



1-Normal, regular tissue

2-Irregularities

3-Advanced cancer

WHAT TRIGGERS THE GENESIS OF CANCER?

The actual cause remains unknown.

The most important thing is to take preventive measures.

But the hypothesis is that:

Over time, the accumulation of damages to **nucleic acids**, particularly **DNA**, could trigger the process of cancer development.

Nucleic acids, RNA (Ribonucleic Acid) and **DNA** (Deoxyribonucleic Acid), are structures found in cell nuclei whose role is to store information and various instructions for the behaviour of the cells that carry them.

5 MOST COMMON CANCERS IN THE UK

(Source: World Cancer Research Fund)

In women:

1. Breast;
2. Lung;
3. Colorectal;
4. Uterine;
5. Skin (melanoma);

In men:

1. Prostate;
2. Colorectal;
3. Lung;
4. Skin;
5. Bladder

SOME RISK FACTORS FOR DEVELOPING CANCER

But this does not mean that you will definitely develop cancer.

- **Smoking;**
- **Alcohol;**
- **Obesity and excess weight;**
- **Poor diet: excess and poor choices;**
- **Physical inactivity;**
- **Certain hormone treatments;**
- **Occupational risks;**
- **Long exposure to ultraviolet rays;**
- **Certain infections (e.g. Human Papillomavirus = HPV and Chronic Hepatitis);**
- **Age;**
- **Genetic factors (carrying certain carcinogenic genes);**
- **Air pollution;**
- **Severe decline in natural defence (e.g., Acquired Immunodeficiency Virus infection).**

SOME MYTHS (Cancer Research):

Scientific studies have not proven that the following statements are true and cited as causes of cancer:

- Burned toast;
- Sweeteners in sugary drinks;
- Animal milk and dairy products;
- Genetically modified foods;
- The use of plastic bottles;
- Microwave ovens;
- The use of deodorant.

SOME OTHER OBSERVATIONS

- No food or "super food" can prevent cancer on its own.
- Few foods can cause cancer.
- However, we know that high consumption of red and processed meat can increase the risk of colorectal cancer.

Very important, let's avoid the oppression generated by the fear of living with or catching cancer.

Instead, let's stick to a healthy, balanced diet and adhering to practical advice that can reduce this risk is the best attitude.

ALARMING SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Often vague, not specific for cancer, however, most important thing is that if you observe any of the following, don't delay consulting your GP:

- Persistent pain,
- Excessive and unexplained fatigue,
- Weight change (gain/loss),
- A persistent lump/lump,
- Change in skin tone,
- Change in the way you go when you need to, whether small or large.



CANCER DIAGNOSIS

This is the role of the doctor, who will examine the individual and order appropriate tests for each type of suspected cancer to arrive at a diagnosis.

After a positive cancer diagnosis, the next steps typically involve consultations with specialists to determine the best course of action.

The consultant, often working with a multidisciplinary team, will assess the type and stage of cancer, the patient's overall health, and available treatment options.

TREATMENT PLANNING

- **Consultation with Specialists:** Patients meet with oncologists, surgeons, and other healthcare professionals to discuss treatment strategies.
- **Additional Tests:** Tests such as imaging scans and blood work may be conducted to refine the diagnosis and treatment plan.
- **Treatment Options:** Alone or in combination, depending on the cancer type and stage, treatments may include:
 - **Surgery:** Removing the tumour or affected tissue.
 - **Radiation Therapy:** Using high-energy rays to target cancer cells.
 - **Chemotherapy:** Administering drugs to kill or slow cancer growth.
 - **Immunotherapy:** Boosting the body's immune system to fight cancer.
 - **Targeted Therapy:** Using drugs designed to attack specific cancer cells.
 - **Palliative Care:** Managing symptoms and improving quality of life.

DECISION MAKING PROCESS

The consultant will discuss treatment options with the patient, considering factors such as effectiveness, side effects, and personal preferences.

Patients may also seek second opinions or explore clinical trials for innovative treatments.

PREVENTION PLAYS A CRUCIAL ROLE

Reducing cancer risk involves making healthy lifestyle choices and being mindful of environmental factors. Here are some key strategies:

- **Avoid Tobacco:** Smoking is the leading preventable cause of cancer. Quitting or avoiding tobacco significantly lowers your risk.
- **Maintain a Healthy Weight:** Obesity is linked to several types of cancer. Eating a balanced diet and staying active can help.
- **Eat a Nutritious Diet:** Focus on fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean proteins. Limit processed foods, red meat.
- **Stay Physically Active:** Regular exercise helps regulate hormones and reduce inflammation, lowering cancer risk.
- **Protect Yourself from UV Radiation:** Use sunscreen and avoid excessive sun exposure to reduce the risk of skin cancer.

- Limit Alcohol Consumption: Excessive alcohol intake increases the risk of several cancers, including liver and breast cancer.
- Avoid Exposure to Harmful Chemicals: Reduce exposure to environmental toxins, such as air pollution and radiation.
- Get Screened Regularly: Early detection through screenings can help catch cancer in its early stages when treatment is most effective.

Making these changes can significantly lower your risk of developing cancer.

FREE CANCER SCREENING PROGRAMS OFFERED BY THE NHS FOR THOSE WHO ARE REGISTERED WITH A GP.

WE ENCOURAGE PEOPLE TO JOIN THEM WITHOUT FEAR.

THE GOAL OF THE PROGRAMS

To improve treatment outcomes through early diagnosis; this not only offers a better chance of remission, but also allows physicians to better choose treatment options.

The stage of the cancer at the time of diagnosis is a key determinant of treatment success. These screening programs are therefore designed to diagnose cancers early and improve patient survival.

Moreover, a negative test provides reassurance.

THE LIST AND ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

For women:

1- CERVICAL CANCER:

By invitation letter to book an appointment;

Qualification: 25-49 years: every 3 years;

50-64 years: every 5 years

2- BREAST CANCER:

By invitation letter every 3 years;

Qualification: 50 - 71 years;

Beyond, by request by calling **0203748 2024**.

For both genders:

COLORECTAL (Bowel) CANCER.

Qualifications: Men and women aged 60-74 will receive an invitation letter every two years. This qualification could be extended to the 50-59 age groups as well.

For Men:

Apart from colorectal cancer screening, and for several reasons still being debated, there is no automatic invitation for prostate cancer screening; discuss this with your family doctor (GP).

We encourage readers to NEVER neglect screening tests, to increase their chances of early diagnosis, which allows for better treatment choices and a higher chance of remission.

WHERE TO FIND ADVICE?

- Ask your GP;
- There are organizations that can advise you;
- SALEM HEALTH PROJECT can advise you at any time.
Our details are at the end of the brochure;
- Check “North East London Cancer Alliance (NELCA)” website:
nelcanceralliance.nhs.uk/preventing-cancer/reducing-your-risk-cancer

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We thank the staff of the “North East London Alliance” who funded this project and particularly the publication of this brochure.

INFORMATION SOURCES:

- Cancer Research UK website,
- Prostate Cancer website,
- NHS website,
- NELCA website.

SALEM HEALTH PROJECT

SHP is a health organization set up to promote health and wellbeing, to prevent major chronic diseases and to level health inequality among Black Africans, primarily for French Speaking Community members, of all ages and genders living in the United Kingdom with the provision of extending our activities abroad.

Our main objectives are fulfilled by raising awareness, giving advice and information, referring, educating people, advocating, campaigning and supporting where possible.

SHP value partnership activities and we also work closely or supported by some local, London wide and national umbrella organisations such as NHS, Refugee Council, National AIDS Trust, Sickle Cell Society, One Newham, Aston Mansfield and many others.

We have so far completed series of activities from one off events to long term programmes for youth, adult and older people, including a four year programme of a weekly one hour TV health awareness broadcasting at a SKY channel owned by a community leader (Olive TV, SKY 983).

Our “Diabetes Type 2 Conference” in partnership with the University of East London in September 2024, is an example of SHP performances. The link to watch the YouTube video of the conference, alongside with some other downloadable booklets that we have published, may be found on our website:
www.salemhealthproject.org.uk.

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