



MYTH 03

THERE IS NOTHING I CAN DO ABOUT CANCER

Truth: There is a lot that can be done at an individual, community and policy level and with the right strategies; a third of the most common cancers can be prevented.

PROMOTING HEALTHY LIFESTYLES

The conditions in which people live and work, and their lifestyles, influence their health and quality of life.

Evidence

- Global, regional and national policies and programmes that promote healthy lifestyles are essential to reducing cancers that are caused by factors such as harmful use of alcohol, unhealthy diet and lack of physical activity.
- Tobacco use, the most common risk factor, is linked to 71% of lung cancer deaths and accounts for at least 22% of all cancer deaths. Based on current trends, tobacco use is estimated to kill one billion people in the 21st century.
- Alcohol is a known risk factor for cancer. It is strongly linked with an increased risk of cancers of the mouth, pharynx, larynx, oesophagus, bowel and breast, and may also increase the risk of liver cancer and bowel cancer in women.
- Overweight and obesity is increasing globally at an alarming rate, including among children and adolescents. Also of concern is the high proportion of overweight people living in low resource settings (two-thirds of the global total). Overweight and obesity is also strongly linked to increased risks of bowel, breast, uterine, pancreatic, oesophagus, kidney and gallbladder cancers.
- Rising rates of obesity will lead to increased cancer rates unless policies and actions are taken to improve people's diets and levels of physical activity.



Global Advocacy Message

The implementation of policies and programmes that support a life-course approach to prevention, and strengthen the capacity of individuals to adopt healthy lifestyles choices can bring about behavioural change, which can help prevent cancer.

HEALTHY WORKPLACES

Evidence

- Organisations of all sizes can create environments that protect and promote the health of their employees, by providing:
 - 100% tobacco and smoke-free environments
 - Provision of and access to healthy food options
 - Workplace health education programmes and policies that create awareness of cancer risk factors and the importance of early detection.
- Specific efforts are also needed to reduce the global burden of occupational cancer risks.
- The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that 177,000 cancer deaths each year are related to occupational exposure to selected carcinogens, with one in every three deaths estimated to be caused by asbestos.
- Another known recreational and workplace exposure is ultraviolet (UV) light, usually from the sun. Exposure to UV light is the main cause of skin cancer.



Global Advocacy Message

Prevention is the most cost-effective and sustainable way of reducing the global cancer burden in the long-term. Effective cancer prevention at the national level begins with a national cancer control plan (NCCP) that responds to a country's cancer burden and cancer risk factor prevalence. NCCPs should include evidence-based resource-appropriate policies and programmes that reduce the level of exposure to risk factors for cancer and strengthen the capacity of individuals to adopt lifestyle choices that promote good health for life.

REDUCE THE RISK OF INFECTION-RELATED CANCERS

For developing countries, the situation often goes beyond addressing behavioural change, with many countries facing a 'double burden' of exposures, the most common of which is cancer-causing infections.

Evidence

- Chronic infections are estimated to cause approximately 16% of all cancers globally, with this figure rising to almost 23% in developing countries.
- Several of the most common cancers in developing countries such as liver, cervical and stomach cancers are associated with infections with hepatitis B virus (HBV), the human papillomavirus (HPV), and the bacterium *Helicobacter pylori* (*H. pylori*), respectively.



Global Advocacy Message

Two safe and effective vaccines can prevent infection-related cancers: liver cancer with the hepatitis B vaccine, and cervical cancer with the human papillomavirus vaccine. These vaccines offer a solution to mitigating the global cancer burden and should be included in national immunisation schedules and as part of national cancer control plans.

JOINING FORCES

Most premature deaths from cancer are preventable by influencing policy in sectors outside of health rather than by making changes in health policy alone.

Evidence

- A whole-of-government approach that promotes multisectoral action and partnerships including with the private sector is essential to develop and implement effective evidence-based policies, legislation and programmes:
 - The ICCP portal – International Cancer Control Partnership Portal (<http://www.iccp-portal.org>) showcases best practices in cancer control planning at the national level.
 - The McCabe Centre for Law and Cancer helps build capacity globally in the effective use of law for cancer prevention, treatment, supportive care and research.
 - The NCD Alliance connects the global non-communicable disease (NCD) community to elevate cancer and NCDs within the global health and development agenda.



Global Advocacy Message

Broadening the future internationally-agreed development goals to include proven economically-sound interventions that span the entire cancer control and care continuum can strengthen health systems and increase capacity to respond to all of the challenges to development.

The onus is now on the cancer community to push for cancer to be mainstreamed in the post-2015 development agenda.

The 2014 World Cancer Day campaign has been supported by the Dutch Cancer Society and the King Hussein Cancer Foundation