



Cancer

In this summary, the focus will be on lifestyle and what part it can play in the development of cancer. Neither the other causes and factors identified in the development of cancer, nor the treatment of cancer are covered.

Cancer in the Pacific

Rates of cancer appear to be rising in most Pacific Island countries and territories.

What is cancer?

Cancer starts when cells in the body do not develop normally. They grow uncontrollably, and produce more of the same type of cell (reproduce).

This group of cells will become a tumour. This tumour grows very quickly, and takes away the nutrients from nearby normal cells (causing them to die). The tumour can also physically press against an organ like the kidney and damage it. As the tumour grows, its effects get worse. It can also spread to other parts of the body.

Risk factors for cancer

Research shows that different factors (including lifestyle) affect the development of different cancers.

The research is still going on – and we do not have all the answers. The information presented here is a summary of the picture so far.

| Type of cancer | Possible risk factors | Possible protective factors |
|-----------------|---|---|
| Lung cancer | Smoking is the major cause | Vegetables and fruits – especially red, orange and yellow-coloured ones |
| Breast cancer | Alcohol Obesity/overweight | Vegetables and fruits |
| Prostate cancer | Meat, dairy foods and fat | Vegetables |
| Bowel cancer | Red meat and alcohol BBQ and burnt foods (especially if fatty) | Vegetables Physical activity |
| Stomach cancer | Obesity/overweight Salted, pickled and preserved foods | Fruits and vegetables |
| Mouth cancer | Smoking, tobacco chewing, betel nut chewing | Fruits and vegetables |
| Skin cancer | High sun exposure | |
| Liver cancer | Alcohol abuse | Vegetables |

(The information in this table is widely accepted; however, it is only part of the picture.)

It is thought that up to 40 per cent of all cancers could be prevented by individuals adopting a healthy lifestyle. If smoking is included in this change, cancer rates could fall by 60–70 per cent.

The protective factors only reduce the risks; they do not prevent cancer. For example eating lots of

fruits and vegetables does not mean that it is all right to smoke. Smoking is still very likely to cause lung cancer. Research findings so far have led to organisations such as the World Cancer Research Fund developing guidelines on preventing cancer. These are very similar to general healthy lifestyle recommendations.

Guidelines for the Pacific

1. Keep to a healthy weight – and avoid becoming overweight.
2. Stay active – do something every day. Try walking, swimming, dancing or gardening.
3. Eat plenty of fruits and vegetables every day – include some at every meal and snack.
4. Eat local staples such as taro, breadfruit and yam.
5. Avoid alcohol if possible – or drink sensibly.
6. Don't eat too much red meat and choose meat that is not fatty.
7. Don't eat too much fat, oil and fatty and fried foods.
8. Don't eat too much salt and salty food.
9. Take care of your food – keep food covered from flies, and don't store it for too long. Don't eat food that is mouldy or bad.
10. Avoid eating burnt or barbecued food too often. Wrap food in banana leaves or foil before barbecuing.
11. Have cancer checks regularly, e.g. cervical screening and self-examination (for breast and testicular cancers).
12. Avoid too much sun – if your skin is pale you should wear sunscreen and avoid spending too much time in direct sunlight.
13. Do not use tobacco or chew betel nut (both cause cancer). Breathing in other people's cigarette smoke is also harmful.

Special vitamin and mineral tablets are not needed. A healthy lifestyle is the answer.

**Following
a healthy lifestyle will help to reduce
everyone's risk of cancer.**