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## About two out of five cancers can be prevented

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4 February 2010 -- As we mark World Cancer Day, this episode focuses on cancer prevention. Each year, over 12 million people are diagnosed with cancer. Cancer kills more people than AIDS, malaria, and TB combined but the good news is that approximately two out of five cancers are potentially preventable.

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### Transcript of the podcast

**Veronica Riemer:** You're listening to the WHO podcast and my name is Veronica Riemer. As we mark World Cancer Day on the 4th February, this episode focuses on cancer prevention.

Each year, over 12 million people are diagnosed with cancer. Cancer kills more people than AIDS, malaria, and TB combined and the death toll is set to rise dramatically in the coming decades. Two-thirds of cancer-related deaths occur in countries where resources available for cancer control and services are limited or nonexistent. But, the good news is that approximately two out of five cancers are potentially preventable. The World Cancer Declaration has set out targets to stop and reverse current trends. Mr Cary Adams, Chief Executive Officer of the International Union against Cancer explains.

**Mr Cary Adams:** One of those targets - target 3 - is about prevention, the things that we can all do, which will limit the chances of us getting cancer in due course. For example, stop tobacco use, limit alcohol consumption, avoid excessive sun exposure, maintain a healthy weight and of course protect against cancer causing infections.

**Veronica Riemer:** Dr Chris Wild, Director of the International Agency for Research on Cancer tells us why prevention is critical, especially in regions of the world which have the least capacity to treat this disease as they have the least developed clinical services.

**Dr Chris Wild:** In the example of Africa where we currently have 500 000 new cases of cancer each year, we have fairly precise estimates that in the next 30-40 years there will be three to four times as many cancers in that part of the world. It is very difficult to envisage treatment being able to respond to that challenge, whereas prevention would be a much better approach to reduce the burden of disease.

**Veronica Riemer:** One fifth of all cancers worldwide are caused by a chronic infection. Some examples are human papilloma virus (also known as HPV) which causes cancer of the cervix, hepatitis B virus (HBV) which causes liver cancer and Helicobacter pylori causing stomach cancers. Professor Harald zur Hausen a German virologist researching cancer of the cervix, discovered the role of papilloma viruses, for which he received the Nobel Prize in 2008.

**Professor Harald zur Hausen:** HPV is clearly a causative agent of cancer of the cervix and in addition, there is good reason to suspect that it also causes parts of all pharyngeal cancer of the throat and in particular of the tonsils and it is also involved in other cancers in particular in anal cancer.

**Veronica Riemer:** Cancer is one of several noncommunicable diseases which affects millions of people and causes life-long illness. WHO and its partners have developed an action plan to prevent these diseases from occurring and to help those already affected to cope. Dr Ala Alwan, is WHO's Assistant Director-General of the noncommunicable diseases and mental health department:

**Dr Ala Alwan:** The global strategy for the prevention and control of noncommunicable diseases has three key priorities. One is to map and monitor noncommunicable diseases which are, in addition to cancer: heart disease, stroke, diabetes and chronic lung disease. Two is to reduce the exposure to the risk factors and these are tobacco, unhealthy diet, physical inactivity and the harmful use of alcohol. Thirdly is to strengthen health care services for people with cancer and other noncommunicable diseases.

The action plan is being implemented by all countries and so achievements in the prevention and control of cancer and noncommunicable diseases will have a major positive impact.

**Veronica Riemer:** That's all for episode of the WHO podcast. Thanks for listening. If you would like further information about World Cancer Day or the WHO Action plan, please see the links on the transcript page of this podcast. For the World Health Organization, this is Veronica Riemer in Geneva.

#### **Related links**

[Action Plan for the Global Strategy for the Prevention and Control of Noncommunicable Diseases](#)  
[World Cancer Day](#)

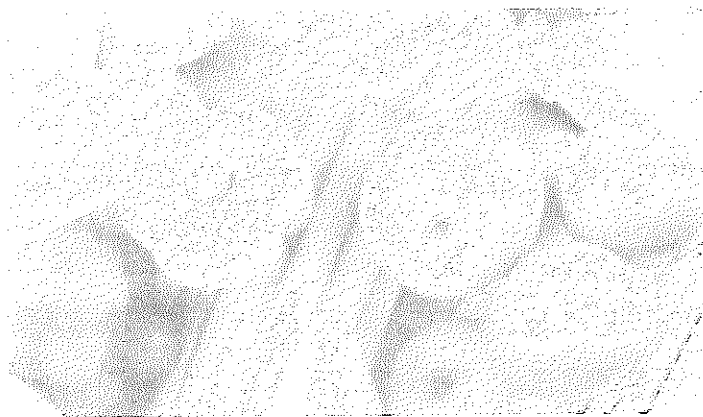
# Healthy lifestyle reduces cancer risk

Eating fruit and vegetables and keeping weight down can reduce risk of 12 major cancers by 39%, says international report

Staff and agencies

guardian.co.uk, Thursday 26 February 2009 10.48 GMT

A [healthier](#)



More of this can result in a reduced risk of cancer. Photograph: Corbis

Cutting down on red meat and alcohol while eating more fruit and vegetables could prevent thousands of cancer cases each year, a new report said today.

A major study from the World Cancer Research Fund (WCRF) found that an estimated 39% of 12 major cancers could be prevented by adopting a healthy lifestyle.

This included almost half (43%) of cases of bowel cancer and 42% of breast cancer cases.

Increasing the amount of fresh vegetables and fruit in the diet and cutting down on alcohol could prevent 67% of cases of mouth, pharynx and larynx cancer each year, the report said.

This is equivalent to more than 3,300 cases each year in the UK.

For cancer of the oesophagus, 75% of cases (around 5,800 cases a year) could be prevented with increased intake of fruit and vegetables, less alcohol and maintaining a healthy weight.

Almost half (45%) of cases of stomach cancer (around 3,500 cases a year) could be cut by less salt and more fruit and vegetables.

Meanwhile, 41% of cases of pancreatic cancer (3,100 cases a year) could be prevented if people kept their weight in check and ate more foods containing folate, such as green vegetables, brown rice and fortified breakfast cereals.

Bowel cancer cases could be cut by 43% (around 15,700 cases a year) if people ate more fibre, cut down on red and processed meats and alcohol and increased their exercise levels while keeping their weight within a healthy range.

Almost one in five (19%) kidney cancer cases could be prevented by keeping weight in check (around 1,400 new cases a year) while 42% of breast cancer cases (around 19,100 cases a year) could be prevented by cutting down on alcohol, increasing exercise and keeping weight in check.

The report, *Policy and Action for Cancer Prevention*, was written by 23 experts from around the world.

The WCRF recommends that people wishing to help prevent cancer should:

- Keep themselves as lean as possible without becoming underweight;
- Eat five portions of fruit and vegetables each day;
- Be physically active for at least 30 minutes every day;
- Avoid sugary drinks;
- Cut down on processed foods high in added sugar or fat, or low in fibre;
- Limit red meats (such as beef, pork and lamb) and avoid processed meats;
- Drink no more than two units of alcohol a day (for men) or one unit (for women);
- Limit salt intake;
- Avoid using vitamin supplements to protect against cancer.

The report also calls on world governments, media, industry, individuals and workplaces to encourage exercise and cut down on unhealthy foods.

It said governments should use legislation and pricing to discourage people from eating unhealthy food while encouraging healthy eating.

Professor Sir Michael Marmot, chair of the WCRF panel, said: "This report shows that by making relatively straightforward changes, we could significantly reduce the number of cancer cases around the world.

"When people think of policy reports, they often think they are only relevant to governments.

"But while governments are important in this, the evidence shows that when it comes to cancer prevention, all groups in society have a role to play.

"This report is relevant to everyone from heads of government to the people who do the weekly food shopping for their family."

Professor Martin Wiseman, project director of the report, said: "On a global level every year, there are millions of cancer cases that could have been prevented and this is why we need to act now before the situation gets even worse.

"We are expecting a substantial increase in cancer rates with the ageing population, obesity rates soaring, and with people becoming less active and increasingly consuming highly processed and energy-dense foods and drinks.

"The good news is that this is not inevitable and we still have the chance to avert a crisis before it is too late."

Professor Mike Richards, the government's cancer tsar, said: "The evidence linking diet, physical activity, obesity and cancer has become stronger over the last decade and this report can play a part in people adopting healthier lifestyles.

"After not smoking, it is clear that diet, physical activity and weight are the most important things people can do to reduce their cancer risk."

Richard Davidson, director of policy and public affairs for Cancer Research UK, said:

"Around 13,000 cancer cases in the UK are linked to being overweight or obese.

"And even more are linked to poor diets, drinking too much alcohol and not doing enough exercise. After smoking, these are some of the biggest preventable causes of cancer.

"Doing nothing could be disastrous."