



ON CALL

Lay Community Health Advisors

Risk factors for cancer

Introduction

This short handbook will provide you with some additional information about the risk factor for cancer.

This handbook will be useful in promoting positive mental health with members of your local health network. Thanks to reading this handbook you will know more about most certain ways to lower the risk of getting cancer by eliminating risk factors from our life.

There are two kind of cancer risk factors – those we can control, and those we don't have much influence on.

Shortly about cancer

"Cancer" is a term used to describe a set of diseases that differ in type and location but have one thing in common - extraordinary cell growth that goes beyond control.

Under normal circumstances, the growth of all our cells is strictly controlled. But when the control signals of one of the cells are malfunctioning and the cell's life cycle is disturbed, the cell keeps dividing.

The uncontrolled growth progresses and the result is an over-enlarged mass called

a "tumor". The tumor can be both benign and malignant.

Risk factors for cancer that we cannot control

There are some risk factors for cancer that we unfortunately cannot control, or can control only to some extent. Best we can do in that situation is to monitor ourselves often – cancer spotted in early stadium of development is way easier to treat than in advanced stadium.

The two most common risk factors that we don't have much influence on are:

- Age - for many individual cancer types age is the most important risk factor for cancer.
- Genetic predisposition to the development of cancer - means that the same type of cancer occurs in more members of one family. This applies mostly to breast, ovarian and gastrointestinal cancer. Such persons should report to preventive examinations at genetic clinics more often than

others.

Risk factors for cancer that we can control

- Eating too much sugar - Many studies have proven that there is a close relationship between eating large amounts of sugar and an increased risk of developing cancer. It is proved that cancer likes to use sugar as a kind of "fuel" that helps it grow.

Tip: Cut down on sugar!

- Highly processed food – as it is various types of additional substances are added to it (including salt, flavour enhancers, etc.). People who consume excessive amounts of these types of products are at a high risk of developing cancer.

Tip: Focus on eating unprocessed, fresh and local products!

- Tobacco - It is well known for years that cigarettes contain many substances that cause cancer. Even each packet have a sign warning us that "smoking kills". All tobacco product in any form are dangerous.

Tip: Quit use of tobacco In any way!

- Exposure to sun without using sunscreen – An excessive sun exposure is very dangerous. If we expose the skin to the sun for more than 15 minutes, we should apply the sunscreen.

Tip: Always use sunscreen before sunbathing, and remember to use it every day in the summer!

- Toxic chemicals - There are many substances that we can come into contact with almost every day that can contribute to cancer like e.g. aluminium, hair dyes or asbestos etc. Some of us have to use them in the workplace every day and it is not really possible to completely avoid using them, but we can remember about using right kind of protections.

Tip: If it is possible eliminate toxic substances from your life.

- Smog - Smog resulting from burning coal is very dangerous for our health, including being one of the causes of cancer. Although it is really hard to avoid smog when we live in a big city, it is possible to eliminate it from our live. When it

comes to polluted air – the inhalation of asbestos dust, mineral oil vapors, gas tar products, oil and gas, soot is also deadly.

Tip: If it is possible spend more time outside big cities, preferably on countryside or even better in mountains!

- Unhealthy diet - avoid eating too much fats, especially fried and rancid, table salt, alcohol, saccharin, large amounts of coffee and black tea, some kinds of edible mushrooms and beer. Some food additives marked with the E symbol have also carcinogenic potential

Tip: try to avoid fat and processed food!

- Alcohol - Excessive alcohol consumption increases the likelihood of very many types of cancer - mainly the gastrointestinal tract like larynx cancer or esophageal cancer.

Tip: Cut down on alcohol consumption!

- Radiation - do not expose yourself to large amounts of radiation

unnecessarily

How to use this Resource with your Local Health Group?

This handbook presents information on the topic of risk factors for cancer. It helps us understand what factors can increase our chances of getting cancer and how can we influence those factors to lower that risk.

Reviewing this handbook before each session with the group will help you to lead a discussion about the topic.

In the resources you will also find a PowerPoint presentation which will help you to explain the topic to your group and start a conversation with them.

Group Activity

After you have shared the digital resource and the PowerPoint presentation with your group, you can start a group discussion asking if all group members following questions:

- Would you consider yourself as a part of cancer risk group?
- Think about your habits, what can you change in your daily life to lower the risk of getting cancer?

- Why nowadays more people are suffering from cancer than century ago? What changed?





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