

# Causes of cancer

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## Alcohol

As drinking alcohol is considered a vice, it seems obvious that it must be bad for us. The problem for researchers is that alcohol abuse seems to go hand in hand with tobacco abuse. Alcoholics tend to be heavy smokers. Smokers generally enjoy a drink or two. Separating the effects of these two vices is therefore fraught with experimental difficulties.

There appears to be, in excessive quantities, and in association with other pollutants, a measurable tendency for alcohol to exacerbate a cancer risk in cases of cancers of the lips, tongue and other areas in the mouth and throat.

Against this, it is now generally accepted that alcohol in certain quantities has a beneficial effect on health. The divisive question is this: at what level of intake does alcohol cease to be beneficial. This is an area where the personal beliefs of the experimenters may affect the results obtained. Some researchers from Boston, on the one hand, claim that two or three glasses of wine a week is the maximum associated with good health in women. This research was based on a study of 121,700 nurses over a 19 year period. This research suggested that two glasses of wine a day was not as healthy as no wine at all.

A British study of 12,000 doctors between 1978 and 1991 showed that the most healthy were those who drank 8-21 units of alcohol a week ie up to three glasses of wine a day. However, it took around 60 units of alcohol a week before the death rate equalled that of teetotallers. This would allow a bottle of wine plus a nightcap.

So does this mean that what's good for men is bad for women? Possibly.

Not all alcohols are equal. Beer is supposed to be good as it restores the pH of the body to a healthy state. Red wine is good for reasons to be found in the grape but spirits are universally frowned upon.

But alcohol's benefits relate not to cancer but to heart disease. So it is possible that a slight cancer risk is outweighed by greater heart disease benefits. Certainly, rural Greeks who like to drink a glass of red wine with their meals have one of the highest life expectancies in the world. But French men, who are not abstemious, have one of the world's highest cancer rates for men (fifth) - more than double that of French women who have a far lower incidence (35th). Do drinking habits explain this difference? If so, then what do we make of the figures for England and Wales where men are 10% less likely to die of cancer compared with their French colleagues - do they drink less? Is beer healthier than wine? Or, heretical thought, is the English diet healthier than the French? Some studies suggest that tea drinking protects against cancer.

The answer of course may have nothing to do with dietary factors. But diet is known to be a major factor. In the case of stomach cancer, to give another example, the Japanese have a much higher rate than Americans - but third generation Japanese immigrants to America have the same cancer rates as their white American neighbours.

## Cellular adaptation to environmental changes

Some researchers say that large doses of any pollutant for a limited period of time is unlikely to lead to cancer. But even low doses of a pollutant over a long period of time may result in cancerous

growths as the tissue attempts to adapt to the change in its environment. New carpets that have been treated with a variety of chemicals have been implicated as a cancer cause.

There are studies that show long term exposure to vehicle exhaust is a definite risk factor and chemical workers have to be concerned about cancer of the bladder (from exposure to 4-aminobiphenyl, benzidene and/or naphthylamine), lung cancer (from exposure to Bis(chloromethyl) ether) and liver cancer (from exposure to vinyl chloride).

Having noted that benzene and vinyl chloride are known to be dangerous to chemical workers, how do you feel about the following information?

Pollution has also introduced a number of carcinogens into drinking water, including known occupational carcinogens such as benzene and vinyl chloride. However, the amounts of these chemicals in drinking water are...very small compared to those in the workplace, and consequently do not seem likely to represent any significant carcinogenic risk. (Cooper, 1993)

### **Dietary Fat and Sugar**

High dietary fats and sugar are implicated in a number of cancers – but very low fat diets are too. A median fat diet is best. High-fat diets are associated with colon cancer, and possibly with breast cancer as well, although this is controversial. Some people suggest that the correlation of sugar intake and breast cancer is much higher than the correlation with high dietary fat. (Studies of mice support the high-fat link with breast cancer.) However, a large-scale study in the US involving 90,000 women failed to find any dietary differences between those who got breast cancer and those who didn't.

### **Dietary Fibre**

Low-fibre diets are strongly correlated with high incidences of cancer of the colon and rectum. High fibre is associated with lower colon cancer risk.

### **Electro-magnetic fields (EMFs)**

Electro-magnetic fields have also been implicated as a major cause of cancer. This means not just the electrician who works with electrical systems everyday is at risk but also the woman who uses an electrical blanket and the child who sleeps in a house near a power line. This link has never been proved – but evidence is mounting.

One study conducted by the University of North Carolina School of Public Health found that children of mothers who slept under electric blankets developed 250% more brain tumors, 70% more leukemias and 30% more cancers than those who didn't.

One of the earliest reports on the dangers of EMFs appeared in the Journal of Occupational Medicine in 1985. This article reported that deaths in Maryland from various cancers were up to 3 times higher among electricians, electrical engineers and linesmen than any other occupation.

Since World War Two, we have filled the air with electromagnetic waves. They beam down on our houses through telephone wires, television satellite dishes, AM and FM radio receivers. Add to this beepers, cellular phones, CB radios and other radios. Then there are the electrical coils in the kitchen and electric blankets. Add to this the overhead power lines and we see how dependent we

are on emf producing equipment. If they are dangerous then we have problems.

Dr Robert Becker, a world expert in this field, is in no doubt: 'At this time the scientific evidence is absolutely conclusive: 60 cycle magnetic fields cause human cancer cells to permanently increase their rate of growth by as much as 1600% and to develop more malignant characteristics.'

### **Free radicals**

Free radicals are highly reactive molecular fragments that are hungry for oxygen. If left uncontrolled they would quickly destroy every living creature as they scavenge for oxygen in the cell walls - so damaging the cells. They cause mutations to the cell's DNA and this can result in cancer. Very little, if anything, is mentioned about them in orthodox medical cancer books. One reason for this is that the main orthodox anti-cancer weapons *create* free radicals and the best known means of controlling or minimising their effects are through the use of anti-oxidant vitamins (vitamins A, C and E). Since the use of vitamins has been very generally decried by proponents of orthodox medicine, the whole area of free radicals is an intellectual no-go area.

### **Gender**

Men tend to have a higher risk of getting cancer than women. Each year, for every 100,000 population, between 54.4 (Thailand) and 235.4 (Hungary) men die of cancer. For women the risk varies from 36.4 (Thailand) to 139.4 (Denmark). In only two countries among the top 50 do women have a higher incidence than men: Ecuador and Mexico. The difference in risk between men and women appears to vary from -3% (Ecuador) to +127% (France). The figures quoted are for 1986-88 (CA: Cancer Journal for Clinicians, 1993).

### **Intestinal fluke**

A very recent idea by one physiologist is that the intestinal fluke - a common human parasite - which normally needs to complete its life cycle with the help of an external animal host sometimes, because of changes in the body's chemistry, is forced to complete its cycle in the human liver. The result, it is argued, is cancer. (see The Hulda Clark Cure )

### **Nitrites in Processed Foods**

Pickled, smoked and cured foods are associated with stomach cancer. They contain large amounts of nitrites which can be easily converted to a class of highly potent carcinogenic chemicals called nitrosamines. Vitamin C is known to interfere with the formation of these compounds.

### **Reduced immunity**

It has become common to blame cancer on lowered immune systems. This is generally accepted but the connection between cancer incidence and lowered immune systems is not absolutely proven. For example, people with AIDS, whose immune systems have completely collapsed do not have a higher incidence of most cancers. They do have a higher incidence of Kaposi's sarcoma – an otherwise rare cancer – lymphomas and cancers of the anal-genital area. These last-named cancers are caused by virus infection through sexual activity - particularly Epstein-Barr virus and the human papillomavirus (HPV) which causes genital warts. But although infection by these viruses is widespread in certain areas of the world, it takes a reduced immune system to allow them to form

cancers.

This suggests that a lowered immune system is not a simple and automatic cause of cancer. This may be because our understanding of what constitutes the immune system is too simplistic.

## **Smoking**

We all know that smoking causes lung cancer. This is true but can never be proved. The evidence is statistical: smokers die of lung cancer in much larger numbers than non-smokers. It is also historical: before smoking became a widespread habit lung cancer was an extremely rare disease.

## **Stress**

Stress is a well-known precursor of illness, particularly cancer, and is known to result in a lowered immune response. Illness is possibly the only way the body can tell the mind that it needs to make a drastic change. If the lowered immunity is allowed to remain for any length of time, then the chances of serious illness occurring rise sharply. Often people in these stressful circumstances feel trapped.

## **Trauma**

Another cause of cancer appears to be physical or emotional trauma. One early study of this phenomenon, in 1893, found that of 250 patients at the London Cancer Hospital:

Forty-three gave histories permitting a suspicion of mechanical injuries. Fifteen of the 43 also described themselves as having undergone much recent trouble. Thirty-two others spoke of hard work and privation. In 156 there had been much immediate antecedent trouble, often in very poignant form, (such) as the loss of a near relative. In 19, no causation history could be proved. (a Dr Snow, quoted by Carl O. Simonton et al 1978)

This is why some people disapprove of mammograms, which require the breasts to be squeezed and therefore traumatised. Some studies have indicated that breast cancer is more common among women who have annual checks than among women who don't.

## **Viruses**

Around one-third are believed to be caused by viruses of one sort or another. One minority view is that *all* cancers are caused by microbes which can change shape so that sometimes they appear to be viruses and at other times appear to be bacteria.

## **Causes don't always lead to results**

Some people argue that carcinogenic substances cannot adequately explain the cause of cancer because in most cases of exposure to a carcinogen, there are some, usually a minority, who will get cancer - the others won't. That suggests that the physical and mental health of the person exposed to the carcinogen is a key factor. This is an old medical argument but there is no doubt that the terrain of the body has a key say in whether the seeds of cancer will be able to take root and thrive. If this is the case maybe we should concentrate our efforts on making sure of our basic mental and physical health, so that our contentment and joy are not intruded upon by the dark spectre of cancer.