

# What is Cancer?



General  
information and  
common facts



**CanSupport**  
New Delhi

CanSupport is a Delhi-based organization that has been providing free home based palliative care services to cancer patients and their families in Delhi and the NCR since 1996. Our mission is to enable people with advanced cancer and their families to make informed choices and decisions and to receive appropriate physical, emotional, social and spiritual support.

The content for this booklet was compiled by Nitasha Siddique, a Princeton University intern during the summer of 2016 under the supervision of Dr Reena Sharma, Head of Palliative Care Field Services and Rajni B. Arora, volunteer member of the communication team at CanSupport.

Illustrations by Anita Banerji

Information provided in this booklet has been compiled from various sources in the public domain. Please contact our cancer telephone helpline for further information on cancer or cancer related services.

**CanSupport Helpline: 011-26711212, 9899011212**  
Monday to Friday 9.30 a.m. to 5.30 p.m.

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# What is cancer?

**Cancer:** A disease caused by uncontrolled cell growth. These cells clump together to form “swellings” or “tumors”. Tumors that harm you are called “malignant tumors”. Harmless tumors are called “benign tumors”.

There are many kinds of cancer and cancer can happen to anyone, regardless of age, caste, religion, or gender.

In India, lung and oral cancer in men and breast and cervical cancer in women are the most common so learning about them is very important for you and your family's health.



## Doctor says

Cancer does not spread from one person to the other as it is not caused by germs. Therefore there is no danger of getting cancer by touching, shaking hands or being near someone with cancer.



# How does cancer affect us?

Symptoms of cancer depend on the type of cancer and how advanced it is/how far it has spread. Some general cancer symptoms are:

- Fever
- Fatigue
- Body pains
- Sudden weight loss
- Changes in skin color

But these symptoms don't always mean you have cancer because you can have similar symptoms in other illnesses. If they last very long or are very extreme then it is very important to see a doctor.

Cancer-specific symptoms (if you notice these in yourself or someone else, see a doctor immediately)

**ORAL:** a sore in the mouth that won't heal, swelling in the jaw

**LUNG:** relentless cough, difficulty breathing, chest discomfort

**CERVICAL:** abnormal bleeding, pain in lower abdomen, pain/bleeding during sex, bleeding after menopause

**BREAST:** lump in the breast, redness on chest, changes in breast shape/texture, abnormal discharge from breast

**FACT:** Every year over 7 lakh new cancer patients are registered, and oral and lung cancer in males, cervix and breast in females account for over 50% of all cancer deaths in India.



## Doctor says

Early detection is the key to proper treatment and a higher chance at being cured. Do not hide your difficulties from your doctors. We are here to help!

# Tools to fight cancer

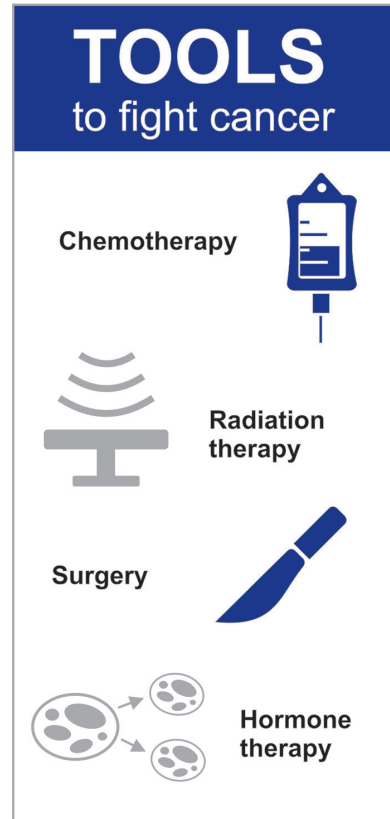
There are many treatments for cancer and many forms of cancer are curable, especially when treated early like breast cancer.

**Chemotherapy:** medicine that destroys cancer cells. This medicine can be taken as a pill or injection.

**Radiation therapy:** uses different rays such as x-ray, electron beam, and protons, to destroy cancer cells.

**Surgery:** surgeons remove cancerous tumors to cure or lessen the symptoms of cancer. Surgery is done depending on the patient's health and the extent of the cancer.

**Hormone therapy:** treatment to affect hormones that allow cancer cells to grow. This is done through pills, injections, or surgery. Hormone therapy is used in prostate and breast cancer treatment.



## Doctor says

Cancer is not a death sentence. Thanks to new research on treatments and cures, many survive cancer and go on to live full and happy lives!

# How to strengthen yourself against cancer

To protect ourselves against cancer we have to change our lifestyle so that our bodies can be healthy and strong.

General risk factors for cancer	
Poor diet (diet rich in fats)	Lack of exercise
Sun and radiation exposure	Obesity
Exposure to chemicals and other substances	All forms of tobacco
Alcohol use	Ageing

**FACT:** Around 40% of all cancers in India are attributable to tobacco.

## Habits/factors that increase risk of cancer:

**LUNG:** smoking cigarettes, beedi, hookah + exposure to chemicals like arsenic, diesel exhaust

**ORAL:** tobacco in all forms, betel nut, paan, + alcohol

**CERVICAL:** early marriage/sex, multiple pregnancy, multiple sex partners, poor genital hygiene, HPV (human papilloma virus)

**BREAST:** early menstruation and late menopause, late/no pregnancy, age, family history, no breast feeding

## Start these healthy habits and benefit!

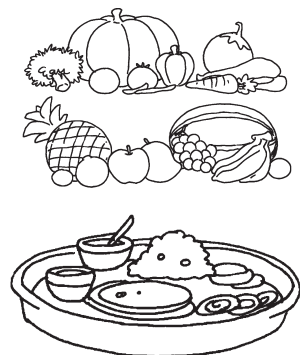
Eating fruits and vegetables

Daily exercise – whether in the gym or at home

Avoiding tobacco, paan, beedi, cigarette and hookah

Practicing safe sex

**HPV Vaccine:** protects against Human Papilloma Virus which is sexually transmitted and can contribute to cervical cancer.



# Ask the Doctor!

**Does dyeing your hair cause cancer?**

*Scientists haven't found any evidence that hair dye causes cancer, so don't worry!*

**I know we should eat less sugar so I use artificial sweeteners. But I heard those cause cancer! Is this true?**

*No, there is nothing in artificial sweeteners that can cause cancer. It's good that you are avoiding too much sugar because too much can lead to obesity, diabetes, and other illnesses.*

**My mom won't buy me a cell phone because she's afraid it will give me cancer. What should I tell her?**

*Cell phones are completely safe to use and extended use does not cause cancer. The rays that come from cell phones are not powerful enough to affect your cells.*

**Does using antiperspirants have any effect on my breasts?**

*No, nothing will happen to your breast tissue from using antiperspirants, nor is there anything harmful in them that can cause cancer.*

**If my husband/wife has cancer, could having sex with them give me cancer too?**

*There is no risk of getting cancer at all. Remember that cancer is not contagious so having sex cannot spread one's cancer to another person.*

**Doctor, I have some of the symptoms you described but I don't feel any pain. Should I still go to see my doctor about them?**

*Yes, absolutely! If you wait until you feel pain, the cancer may reach an advanced stage that is more difficult to treat.*



**If breast and cervical cancer is a problem for women, why are you telling me about it?**

*Breast cancer is a greater problem for women but it happens to men too. Knowing its symptoms is just as important for you so if you were to develop cancer you'd be able to get treated as soon as possible. Yes, cervical cancer won't happen to you but if it happened to your wife for example, then how would you know? Being informed about cancer is not just for your sake, but also for the health of others in your family.*

**I've seen a lot of ayurvedic and desi medicine that say they can cure cancer so why should people go to the hospital to be treated?**

*Ayurvedic and desi medicine have no scientific support to prove that they cure cancer. On the other hand, medical treatments have been tested with proven results and that is why doctors recommend them.*



# Be one step ahead!

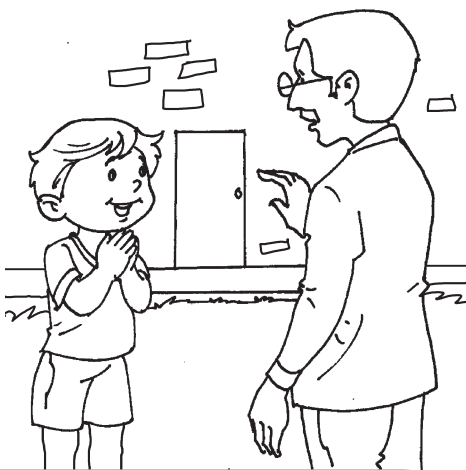
With any battle, you need to plan ahead and prepare so you can be one step ahead of your enemy. Likewise, cancer screenings and regular check-ups are necessary in the battle against cancer. Remember that the sooner a cancer is diagnosed, the better the outcomes of treatment and likelihood of being cured.

**LUNG:** CT scan with doctor if symptoms like insistent cough occur

**ORAL:** self-examination for sores, changes in skin/tongue color, thickened skin or other visible abnormalities, if found, see a doctor.

**BREAST:** monthly breast self-examination. Check-up with doctor every 1-3 years after the age of 20. Mammogram (a type of x-ray) annually after the age of 40 and, every two years after the age of 50. If someone in your immediate family has had breast cancer, a mammogram can be done before the age of 40.

**CERVIX:** pap smear after the age of 21 between 10-20 days from first day of menstruation. This can be done at any outpatient clinic and can be done until the age of 70.



## Doctor says

Cancer can happen to anyone and it is not a punishment from God, or the result of your past sins. Like any other illness, it is a part of life and we must face it with courage and hope!

# Your best weapon against cancer is hope!

If you or someone you care about is diagnosed with cancer, do not despair or think that there is nothing you can do. There are many people out there who are ready to support and guide you, and you can depend on your family and loved ones. The most important thing is to be informed, learn as much as you can and seek help whenever you need it.

- **Cancer can happen to anyone so being informed about cancer is a necessity.**
- **Cancer is not a punishment nor is it contagious.**
- **Lead a healthy lifestyle.**
- **Keep an eye out for symptoms of cancer and avoid harmful habits.**
- **Be sure to get check-ups with the doctor and encourage others too!**
- **Cancer does not mean death – with timely treatment one can be cured**
- **Be hopeful.**



# What have we learnt?

## 1. For which cancers should we do self-examinations?

- A. breast and cervical
- B. lung and oral
- C. breast and oral
- D. lung and cervical

## 2. Which of the following will increase our risk of getting oral cancer?

- A. chewing gum
- B. eating candy
- C. any kind of tobacco
- D. not brushing your teeth

## 3. What can cause a tumor to develop in our body?

- A. exposure to chemicals and radiation
- B. using a cell phone
- C. beauty products like hair dye
- D. none of the above



**True or false, if false then write the correct statement**

1. *Cancer is very rare and only happens to certain people*  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. *Touching someone who has cancer will give us the same cancer*  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. *Early detection increases chances of treating and curing cancer*  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. *We can reduce the risk of cancer by avoiding all kinds of tobacco*  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. *Unsafe sex, early marriage and having children early can increase risk of cervical cancer*  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. *Human Papilloma Virus vaccine should be given to girls between the ages of 9-26 years*  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. *Our eating, drinking, and other habits have a big impact on our chances of getting cancer*  
\_\_\_\_\_

Answers – 1: False; 2: False; 3: True; 4: True; 5: True; 6: True; 7: True





## The Cancer Challenge – Snakes and Ladders

<b>Winner</b>  <b>36</b>	<b>Cancer does not mean end of life- it means 'A New Beginning'</b> <b>-Yes or No?</b> <b>35</b>	 <b>34</b>	 <b>33</b>	<b>Even complete we should regular check</b> <b>-Yes or No?</b>
 <b>25</b>	<b>Cancer can re occur after treatment also</b> <b>-Yes or No?</b> <b>26</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>By staying happy and stress free we can defeat Cancer</b> <b>-Yes or No?</b> <b>28</b>	
<b>24</b>	<b>During the treatment of Cancer we can play and have fun</b> <b>-Yes or No?</b> <b>23</b>	 <b>22</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>During treatment Cancer we should do a routine check</b> <b>-Yes or No?</b>
<b>13</b>	 <b>14</b>	<b>Timely treatment of Cancer can cure it</b> <b>-Yes or No?</b> <b>15</b>	 <b>16</b>	
 <b>12</b>	<b>Treatment of Cancer should not be left incomplete</b> <b>-Yes or No?</b> <b>11</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>9</b>	
<b>Start</b>  <b>1</b>	<b>Anyone can get Cancer at any age</b> <b>-Yes or No?</b> <b>2</b>	<b>Alcohol and cigarette cause Cancer</b> <b>-Yes or No?</b> <b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>Some symptoms of cancer are similar to other diseases</b> <b>-Yes or No?</b>

Board game created by Dr. Aparna Khanna, Associate Professor, Development Communication & Extension (Lady Irwin College)

## and Ladders Game

<p>Even after complete recovery we should go for regular check ups -Yes or No?</p> <p>32</p>	<p>We should eat a nutritious diet during Cancer treatment -Yes or No?</p> <p>31</p>
<p>During the treatment of Cancer we can do our routine activities -Yes or No?</p> <p>29</p>	<p>We should eat a nutritious diet during Cancer treatment -Yes or No?</p> <p>30</p>
<p>During the treatment of Cancer we can do our routine activities -Yes or No?</p> <p>20</p>	<p>We should eat a nutritious diet during Cancer treatment -Yes or No?</p> <p>19</p>
<p>During the treatment of Cancer we can do our routine activities -Yes or No?</p> <p>17</p>	<p>You can not get Cancer by touching a Cancer patient -Yes or No?</p> <p>18</p>
<p>Some symptoms of cancer are similar to other diseases -Yes or No?</p> <p>8</p>	<p>You can not get Cancer by touching a Cancer patient -Yes or No?</p> <p>7</p>
<p>Some symptoms of cancer are similar to other diseases -Yes or No?</p> <p>5</p>	<p>You can not get Cancer by touching a Cancer patient -Yes or No?</p> <p>6</p>

 Cancer can be cured

## Notes and questions

[illegible]



## **CanSupport**

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