



Standing up to cancer

World Cancer Day is on 4 February.

Every year on this day, hundreds of activities and events take place around the world, gathering communities, organisations and individuals and acting as a powerful reminder that we all have a role to play in reducing the global impact of cancer.

Cancer demystified

Cancer is a complex condition but at the same time it can be viewed quite simply as the **uncontrolled multiplication of cells whose DNA has mutated.**

Our cells are genetically programmed to multiply at a certain rate and survive for a certain time. Sometimes however the DNA coding that controls these processes mutates - due to an error during replication, damage from lifestyle or environment or an inherited mutation that suddenly expresses itself.

The accelerated and chaotic growth that follows, can eventually result in a primary tumour that invades the surrounding tissues and interferes with our body's systems.

Some of the tumour's cells can also break away and be carried by the blood or lymphatic systems to other areas of the body where they may continue growing to form secondary tumours - a process known as metastasis.

Although we can sometimes inherit these cancer-causing genetic mutations from our parents, around 95% of cancers start as a result of DNA damage that occurs during the course of our lifetime.

These 'lifetime mutations' can occur naturally as a result of mistakes during cell division - after all, faultlessly replicating DNA's 22,000 genes each time a cell divides is a pretty tough challenge!

Many mutations however occur as a result of our lifestyles and environmental exposures - **and it's these mutations that we can prevent.**

Preventing cancer

At least one in three cases of cancer are preventable through the lifestyle and environmental choices we make.

Avoiding tobacco smoke is by far the most effective thing you can do to reduce your risk of developing a wide range of cancers - but eating or avoiding certain foods, minimising our alcohol intake, being physically active and maintaining a healthy weight make up most of the rest of the lifestyle toolkit.

The top environmental choices you can make are minimising your exposure to cancer-causing substances at work and protecting yourself from the ultraviolet radiation of the sun and tanning devices.

Take the challenge

Lifestyle is clearly a big part of avoiding cancer - so why not sign up to World Cancer Day's 21-day **Focus On Your Health Challenge** to change a healthy new behaviour into a healthy **habit!**

Take control

Yes, cancer can be scary and easy to 'sweep under the rug' because it's mysterious, sometimes aggressive and at the very least, a life-changing health condition. It is however far more preventable - and treatable - than many people realise - especially if caught early.

So don't be afraid of fronting up to cancer - get your lifestyle in shape, be aware of physical changes and take up your NHS screening invites for bowel, breast and cervical cancer. There is no screening programme for prostate cancer, but men over 50 can ask their doctor about it.

For further support and advice visit the charity Macmillan Cancer Support.