

Talking Point: Ways we can dodge cancer

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There are many personal choices such as being sun smart that can help avoid cancers. IF you were told one in three cancers can be prevented, what would you say? You would certainly want to understand how.

We know that many people are scared of cancer and with good reason.

However, it is foolhardy not to be aware what you can do to reduce your risk and avoid being one of the eight Tasmanians diagnosed with cancer each day.

A recent study by Cancer Council Australia shows that, based on 13 identifiable risk factors, there are as many as 37,000 cancers a year that could be prevented.

Despite the myth that everything gives you cancer, the vast majority of preventable cancers are caused by common risk factors that we can deal with in our daily lives.

There are no additional tasks people need to do.

Prevention is doing more or less or stopping some of the activities that your lifestyle may already include.

Every day on this earth allows us to contribute, add value, to love and be loved.

Understand the avoidable risk factors and cut your cancer risk by making some lifestyle changes.

Don't smoke. Tasmania has the highest smoking rates in Australia except the Northern Territory.

We know that smoking can cause up to 16 cancers and that two out of three people who smoke will die from cancer.

We encourage you to quit for good for your own health and that of your family.

It is coming up to the Christmas season when people tend to eat and drink to a much greater degree.

If you are enjoying alcohol, then stick to the two standard drinks a day or make your Dry July a dry December.

Eating a healthy diet at any time of the year will reduce your cancer risk, so don't let those extra few treats at Christmas overtake your good eating habits.

Studies have shown 7000 new cancer cases a year are directly related to low fruit and vegetable intake, low fibre intake and excess red meat.

Keeping a healthy body weight, being active and sitting less will all reduce your risk of cancer.

Remember Norm, the Life Be in It campaign star of the 1970s? Don't be Norm. Be active, proactive and get moving. It can save your life.

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eight Tasmanians diagnosed with cancer each day.

And, of course, be sun smart.

Living in Tasmania the UV can be extremely high and deceiving.

UV cannot be seen or felt so cloud cover is no protection against sunburn. Gone are the days when tanning was a lazy pastime and baby oil and coconut oil were fixtures in the beach bag.

Melanoma is the fourth most commonly diagnosed cancer among Tasmanians, so be sensible in the sun, and ensure your children and grandchildren grow up to be skin cancer free.

Early detection generally gives the best chance of successfully treating cancer as cancers are more difficult to treat as they advance.

National screening programs are available in Australia to detect breast cancer, bowel cancer and cervical cancer.

They are available free of charge with the aim of picking up very early cancers in healthy individuals, who do not have symptoms. Screening programs may save your life or at the very least give you a longer life.

There is a motivational quote which states: "If it is important to you, you will find a way. If not, you will find an excuse."

This is important, not just to you, but to your partner and your family.

Breast cancer causes the most cancer deaths in Australian women.

So why is it that almost half of all Australian women eligible for free mammograms are choosing not to participate in the screening service?

Any discomfort from screening far outweighs the impacts of a cancer diagnosis and the pain of treatment.

A half-hour test every two years is a great return on an investment into your personal health.

In 2006 the Australian Government introduced the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program.

By 2017-18, all Australians 50-74 will be eligible for two-yearly screening tests.

Tasmanian participation in the screening program between July 2013 and June 2014 was 41 per cent.

This statistical outcome is disappointing, even though our rates are above the national average of 36 per cent for the same period.

A significant Cancer Council Tasmania research project undertaken in 2013-14 in one Tasmanian municipality explored men's attitudes and behaviours to bowel screening to gain an understanding of what prevents, delays or encourages males to participate in the program.

The results indicate a fear of the test, lack of knowledge, emotional avoidance and decreased motivation to screen.

Importantly, take responsibility for your own health. Embrace a cancer-smart lifestyle, participate in national screening programs if you are eligible and speak with your doctor when you notice any unusual changes in your body.

Take the initiative. Every day at Cancer Council we meet inspiring and courageous people. For some people cancer has impacted their life for no reason, others have taken responsibility for their health and some wished they had.

Penny Egan is chief executive of Cancer Council Tasmania. Further information can be obtained by phoning the cancer council on 131

[http://www.themercury.com.au/news/opinion/talking-point-ways-we-can-dodge-cancer/news-story/20ca107bad57ce82cafaa0b0ffd65327?=-](http://www.themercury.com.au/news/opinion/talking-point-ways-we-can-dodge-cancer/news-story/20ca107bad57ce82cafaa0b0ffd65327?=)