



Better to prevent cancer than have to fight it later

Cancer is likely one of the most dreaded words in any language. American Cancer Society statistics indicate that more than 1.3 million people are diagnosed with some type of cancer every year in the United States. Last year more than 4,700 were diagnosed in Hawaii.

Question: What is cancer?

Answer: To understand cancer, you first need to understand a bit about the normal biology of the cell. The normal process of healthy cells is to grow and then divide. The last step in the normal process is for the cell to die.

Cancer cells grow and divide. But because of damaged DNA, they keep dividing and duplicating their abnormal DNA.

In a healthy person, damaged DNA is repaired, but this process is stopped in cancerous cells. The aggressive nature of cancer cells makes prevention much preferable to treatment.

Q: How is DNA damaged?

A: There are many ways. During the natural aging process, the risk of damage to DNA increases. This is especially true

if a person has inherited a gene that makes them more susceptible to a specific type of cancer. Other factors that increase the risk include smoking, heavy use of alcohol and excessive exposure to various environmental contaminants.

Q: What helps prevent cancer?

A: Research indicates that a number of things help decrease the risk. These include many of the same guidelines for overall good health:

>> Eat five to nine fruits and vegetables a day.

>> Maintain a healthy body weight.

>> Exercise at least 30 to 45 minutes a day to decrease the risk of breast or colon cancers.

>> Consume red meat, fat, and alcohol in moderation.

>> Don't get sunburned.

Q: Can natural or alternative dietary supplements help?

A: Americans spend more than \$34 billion a year on "complementary and alternative methods," many of these targeted for cancer treatment. Although no magic pill exists to prevent cancer, there is evidence

that along with balanced diet and lifestyle, other factors are worth consideration. For example: It was recently shown that people who consumed more vitamin D had a lower risk of colon cancer. However, because vitamin D is stored in the liver, vitamin D in excess of 2,000 international units a day can cause liver damage.

Q: Is there a reliable scientific source for information on complementary and alternative methods, related to cancer?

A: The recently published "American Cancer Society's Guide to Complementary and Alternative Cancer Methods" is a good starting point. It presents information on commonly promoted cancer treatments ranging from herbs, diet and nutrients; the connection between mind, body and spirit, manual healing and physical touch; and pharmacological and biological methods. Readers can make more informed decisions since the book also covers side effects of various methods that are not well-known.

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