

# Common Misconceptions About Cancer

Cancer myths and misinformation are everywhere. It's important to understand them. Here are some common misconceptions about cancer.

Is cancer contagious? Do cell phones cause cancer? Does eating sugar make cancer worse? Based on the latest research, the answer to all of these questions is no. But according to the National Cancer Institute, they are among the most common misconceptions about cancer.

Such false beliefs can negatively impact people's perceptions of cancer and in some cases even prevent patients from seeking the most recommended treatments.

## Rare breakthrough

The pace of progress in cancer treatment is accelerating by the second. According to the Journal of the American Medical Association, 332 new cancer drugs were approved by U.S. regulators between 2009 and 2020, many of which were also approved by European regulators. 'Breakthroughs are happening all the time,' said Dr. Lynn Turner, director of research at Worldwide Cancer Research. 'We fund discovery research, which is the first step in the journey. Without those early breakthroughs, you can't get them into the clinic and into patients.'

The rise of such treatments has led to dramatic improvements in life expectancy. One of the biggest examples of this is breast cancer. In 2023, a study of more than half a million women found that deaths from a breast cancer diagnosis had fallen by two-thirds since the 1990s.

## There will be a miracle cure for all cancers

We talk about cancer as a single entity, but there are actually more than 200 different types of cancer, with many different characteristics. Some tumors may grow extremely slowly, while others grow rapidly and spread to other parts of the body, a process called metastasis. 'Each cancer behaves differently, and therefore the treatments must be different,' says Turner.

Patients with a particular type of cancer can also have different responses to the same drug, some with strong responses and some with less. As a result, cancer treatment is moving more toward personalized medicine rather than a single approach. With the rise of therapies such as CAR T-cell immunotherapy and possibly cancer vaccines in the coming years, many patients will undergo genome sequencing along with other forms of testing before being prescribed the right drug for their type of cancer.

## Cancer is a new disease

There is evidence that humans and our ape relatives have had cancer for at least 1.7 million years. In 2016, archaeologists in South Africa discovered the skeleton of a prehistoric human with a malignant tumor on his left

toe bone.

Part of the reason cancer seems more common today than it was centuries ago is simply because people are living longer, says Turner. 'This is not a new disease,' she says. 'The longer we live, the more people you're going to see with cancer because it's basically healthy cells that go wrong and don't function properly, and the longer we live, the more likely that is to happen.'

## **Alternative therapy can cure cancer**

From homeopathy to acupuncture, CBD oil, and even apricot kernels, cancer patients will be exposed to all sorts of alternative and experimental therapies as they research their condition.

However, there is no scientific evidence that any alternative to conventional treatments such as chemotherapy, radiation therapy, and immunotherapy can slow the growth of cancer or cure it. In fact, research in the United States has found that patients who try alternative therapies are more likely to die than those who choose the recommended treatment.

'Unfortunately, there's no evidence that things like homeopathy are effective,' says Turner. 'But there's often confusion between alternative and complementary therapies. Things like exercise, meditation, stress reduction, and just being healthy and fit can really help with recovery, alongside conventional treatment.'

## **A healthy lifestyle can completely prevent cancer.**

While living a healthy lifestyle by quitting smoking, cutting back on alcohol, processed meats and other ultra-processed foods, and increasing fiber intake can certainly reduce your risk of cancer, it's not a sure thing.

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that between 30% and 50% of cancer cases are preventable. Cancer ultimately arises from mutations or errors that occur as our cells multiply and divide, which can be directly influenced by toxic chemicals we breathe in or accumulate through our diet, or by genetics.

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