

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT CANCER

There are more than 200 types of cancer, and they all involve abnormal cell growth. Cancers are divided into groups according to the type of cell they start from. Cancers are named for the part of the body they start in.

Among the most common cancers in South Africa are breast and cervical cancer in women, and prostate cancer in men. According to the National Cancer Registry, one in 35 women is diagnosed with cervical cancer each year. Prostate cancer is one of the most common cancers in men and mostly affects men over the age of 50 years.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SCREENING FOR CERVICAL ABNORMALITIES

Although cervical cancer can sometimes be prevented and can go into remission if it is diagnosed and treated early, more than 3 400 South African women die from the disease every year. The human papilloma virus (HPV), contracted through sexual intercourse, is the main cause of cervical cancer. A simple Pap smear test can reduce the number of cervical cancer deaths by up to 80%.

Two new vaccines have been registered in South Africa to prevent HPV infection. Vaccination together with improved Pap smear screenings means that there is no reason to only detect cervical cancer when it is too late.

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Having multiple partners or having a sexually transmitted infection increases women's risk of being infected with HPV. Men can also carry this virus, although they can't become ill themselves.

RISK FACTORS FOR PROSTATE CANCER

An increase in the prostate cancer rate has been reported worldwide, partly due to better prostate screening. South Africa's prostate cancer rate is among the highest in the world. The lifetime risk of developing prostate cancer among South African men is 1 in 24.

Several factors increase a man's risk of developing prostate cancer:

- Being older than 50 years
- A family history of prostate cancer
- A diet high in fat and low in fruit and vegetables.

Coloured and white men have the highest number of cases at 63.4%, while black men have the second highest proportion of prostate cancer cases, averaging 34%. Asian men seem to have the lowest risk, only accounting for 2.5% of all cases.

Detecting prostate cancer early using a prostate-specific antigen (PSA) protein level test, and treating the cancer, may prevent related health problems and reduce the risk of death. A PSA test is not always recommended so be sure to discuss your specific risk profile with your doctor.

SYMPTOMS

Prostate cancer often grows very slowly, without symptoms. In the early stages, some men experience difficulty passing urine, a slow, interrupted flow of urine, frequent urination including at night, and incontinence. Symptoms of advanced prostate cancer include: blood in the urine, pain during urination, lower back or pelvic pain.

TIPS TO PREVENT AND MANAGE CERVICAL AND PROSTATE CANCER

Cancer can be beaten when detected and treated early.

- Women over the age of 16 years who are sexually active should go for a Pap smear every two years.
- Young women should discuss having an HPV vaccination before becoming sexually active. The vaccination is recommended for girls between 9 and 23 years old.
- Men with average risk for prostate cancer over the age of 50 should consider a clinical exam (potentially combined with a PSA test, depending on their doctor's recommendation) at least every three years.

CHAT TO HEALTHY COMPANY FOR FREE ADVICE

Healthy Company is here for you. Contact us through the Discovery app, www.discovery.co.za or 0800 320 420

Resources

The Cancer Association of South Africa
<http://www.cansa.org.za>

We understand that a diagnosis of cancer can be overwhelming and may impact many areas of your life including your finances, home and work life.

As a HealthyCompany member, you and your loved ones are entitled to a range of services including counselling services and financial advice. Contact us on 0800 320 420 for more information.