

Live Healthy and Be Well!

“How to prevent cancer – or at least lower the risk”

--Stephen Jarrard, MD, FACS

The month of October is National Breast Cancer Awareness month. Instead of writing about the topic of breast cancer again, let's address cancer in general, and discuss some related issues. Can cancer be cured? We do speak of a “cure” if a certain treatment can help a person be cancer free for five years. If we are not able to effect complete cure, how is the best way to prevent cancer in general or specific kinds of cancer? And, what are some techniques to at least lower the risk to the minimum amount possible? As always, we would like to present some facts, debunk some of the myths that surround this terrible disease, and always look toward prevention.

Cancer is not as feared as it was even a few years ago. There was a time that when a friend, neighbor, or family member had cancer - people spoke in hushed tones, almost afraid to say the word out loud, and it was often considered a death sentence. Many types of cancer are now much better understood and very treatable. However, many myths have grown up to surround cancer, and this misinformation can often lead to people making bad decisions. The following comments are statements about cancer that are NOT true (no solid scientific evidence):

- “Cancer is a modern, man-made disease.” (Evidence has been found throughout history).
- “Super foods” can cure or prevent cancer. (While diet is important, there are no super mega foods that do this despite a lot of hype).
- “Acidic diets cause cancer.” (Again, diet and nutrition are factors, but this is simply not true).
- “Cancer is a fungus.” (If only it were that easy. Cancer is an abnormal growth of existing cells).
- “Cancer treatment kills more than it cures.” (Cancer therapies are hard, but they do help people and often can bring about a clinical cure or at least induce long remissions).

The best way to attack cancer, as with any other disease, is prevention and limiting known risk factors. Research and experience over the years have taught us much about “how to act” with regards to adopting choices and habits that are healthy and help fight disease. I must credit the staff of the Mayo Clinic for compiling these tips, and if you would like more in depth information, please visit their website at: <http://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-living/adult-health/in-depth/cancer-prevention/art-20044816>

Do not use tobacco. And although we all know this – it should be pointed out that tobacco use does not only lead to lung cancer, but also increases your risk of many other types of cancer. If

you don't smoke, please don't start. If you do and would like help quitting, inform your healthcare provider and they will be glad to steer you in the right direction.

Eat a healthy diet. Especially in our area – there are plenty of fruits and vegetables available. After all, we are now the “farm to table capital” of Georgia! Aim for a high fiber, low fat diet, and try to minimize and moderate processed foods and “fast foods.”

Exercise and be active daily. Strive for and maintain a healthy weight. Limit (moderation) or do not consume alcohol. Proper diet which includes portion control coupled with regular exercise is the best way to lose weight. Fad diets and “gimmicks” do not work in the long term. The bottom line is that to lose weight and take off pounds – you must burn off more calories than you take in on a consistent basis. Sorry - no one likes to hear that, but it is a fact.

Protect yourself from the sun. Wear appropriate clothing to cover your skin. Apply good sunscreen when you cannot avoid the sun. Seek shaded areas when you can. Always remember that even though our society seems to favor the “bronze glow,” ultraviolet radiation from the sun and artificial lamps is not your friend. Tanned skin is damaged skin, and this can pre-dispose to skin cancer.

Immunizations. If you are a high risk individual, or work in the health care field where you might be exposed to bodily fluids – immunization against Hepatitis B is highly recommended, if not required. Hep B is a major risk factor for liver cancer. Also, if you are a young man or woman under the age of 26, you are encouraged to be vaccinated against human papilloma virus (HPV). This is a sexually transmitted virus that can lead to cervical and genital cancers later in life, and also some head and neck skin cancers.

Avoid known risky behaviors. Practice safe sex. Avoid sharing things that might contain or harbor someone else's bodily fluids, such as needles. If you decide to get a tattoo, make sure it is from a reputable, clean, and sanitary place. Both HIV and Hep C seriously damage your immune system and pre-dispose to cancers and other diseases.

Practice health maintenance. See your provider regularly. Get your screenings on time, such as an initial colonoscopy at age 50 – or earlier if you have a family history of colorectal cancer. Women need their regular breast exams and mammograms, as well as their GYN screenings. If you see a suspicious place on your skin, or feel a lump somewhere it shouldn't be – have it checked out as soon as possible. Other common cancer symptoms to be aware of and report include unintended weight loss, unexplained fevers, and night sweats.

As always, we want you healthy and well. But, you must realize that true wellness is more than the absence of disease. There is a physical and “medicine” side to this – but also a mental and spiritual side that is just as important. Do all the above things, but never underestimate the power of a positive attitude, being in spiritual peace and harmony, and having a good support system around you such as family and/or good friends. Your healthcare provider will be more than happy to assist you along the way – but to be truly healthy and well – YOU must take charge!

We really do enjoy hearing from you with any questions, concerns, or ideas for future columns and/or health and wellness related issues for the *Georgia Mountain Laurel*. Please send an email to rabundoctor@gmail.com, or call Felichia at 706-782-3572, and we will be sure to consider your input. If you use Twitter, then follow us for health tips and wellness advice @rabundoctor. Until next month, live healthy and be well!