

## Poor lifestyle habits have aided the prevalence of cancer amongst Indians

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By : BioVoice Correspondent - February 4, 2019



**New Delhi:** This year, Fortis Healthcare observed World Cancer Day by making the Indian public aware of the cancer trends that are prevalent amongst the Indian population. A lifestyle which involves excessive smoking and drinking, lack of physical exercise (leading to obesity and hormone imbalance) and a poor diet is the culprit for the rising number of cancer cases.

World Health Organization's (WHO) International Agency for Research on Cancer stated that cancer will claim 9.6 million lives in the world this year. India will account for 8.17 per cent of the same. Another report by the Lancet reinforced the same saying cancer is India's second biggest killer after heart disease.

As per Dr Mandeep S Malhotra, Head- Breast, Head and Neck Oncology Surgery, "Adopting good lifestyle practices to prevent non communicable diseases, particularly cancer is the need of the hour. We need to ensure we have a balanced diet and engage in regular physical activity. In high income countries our diets are marred with preservatives and added

flavours. A lot of hidden carcinogens are entering our bodies. Tobacco consumption, alcohol intake and substance abuse has increased leaving the body weak and the immune system vulnerable. Lung cancer is also occurring in people who have never smoked as well. Statistics reveal that 15% of patients diagnosed with lung cancer have no history of tobacco use. This could be because of exposure to second hand smoke, asbestos exposure, air pollution (outdoor and indoor), and exposure to radon gas, diesel exhaust fumes or a genetic predisposition.”

Dr Malhotra stated further: “There are two prominent trends that have observed in the last year. Firstly, breast cancer incidence has gone up by 39.1% over the last decade, making it the most prevalent type of cancer. The second trend indicates a high rate of re – occurrence or dual occurrence of cancer. A survivor’s risk of getting a new cancer diagnosis is 14% greater than someone who never had cancer. This is a worrying fact but to counter it, we need to create awareness about regular check-ups and counselling even after one is completely cured.”

In India, majority of cancers are presented once they have advanced to stage three or stage four. This is because periodic screenings and early detection are not practiced stringently. In addition to this many hospitals are not properly equipped to provide adequate treatment to cancer patients. Therefore efforts are focused on ensuring palliative care and therapy as these ultimately lead to the most favorable outcomes.

Dr Kapil Kumar, Director and HOD, Surgical Oncology, Fortis Hospital, Shalimar Bagh said, “There is no increase of incidence from 2018 -2019. However population explosion and pollution increase, exposure to carcinogens may increase the number and incidence of the diseases. Early detection can also contribute. In male’s oral cancer, lung cancer, prostate and GI cancers can be seen as early as the age group of 25 years. In female’s breast cancer, cervix cancer, ovarian and uterine cancer and oral cancers are common from age 35 onwards. Lifestyle factor contributions are tobacco, alcohol, junk food, stress and lack of exercise. India account for high number of oral cancer amongst young due to tobacco, alcohol. 30-35%cases are in this group. Similarly lung cancer incidence is high due to smoking habits. Diagnosed late due to use of antibiotics and ant-tubercular treatment for chest symptoms. Northern India has incidence of gallbladder cancer due to proximity of sub Himalaya Ganges. Gall stones are also contributory. Pollutants in water is one of causes.”

Lung and breast cancer are leading worldwide with approximately 2.1 million diagnoses estimated in 2018. Colorectal cancer (1.8 million cases, 10.2% of the total) is the third most commonly diagnosed cancer, prostate cancer is the fourth (1.3 million cases, 7.1%). Cancer is a generic term for a large group of diseases that can affect any part of the body. Other terms used are malignant tumours and neoplasms. The defining feature of cancer is the rapid creation of abnormal cells that grow beyond their usual boundaries. Between 30–50% of cancers can currently be prevented. This can be accomplished by avoiding risk factors and implementing existing evidence-based prevention strategies.