
New research shows Australians confused about cancer risks and prevention

Cancer Council creates iheard.com.au to help dispel myths

New Cancer Council research released today (30/11) has found three quarters (76%) of Australians are confused about cancer prevention, mistakenly believing measures like drinking plenty of water (50%), getting enough sleep (47%) and positive thinking (43%) reduces their risk of cancer.

According to the survey,* there was limited awareness of the link between cancer and some factors known to increase risk, such as processed meat (31%), alcohol (47%) and being overweight (53%).

Australians were just as confused about risk, incorrectly thinking cancer is caused by non-carcinogenic factors, with more than half (54%) blaming stress.

In an effort to combat the misconceptions, Cancer Council has launched a new website, iheard.com.au, to provide evidence-based answers to questions about cancer.

Cancer Council Australia CEO, Professor Ian Olver, said the survey results highlighted the level of misinformation about cancer, much of it sourced from websites and social media, where fanciful claims could be made without any credible scientific evidence.

“There is a huge amount of misinformation out there and, as a result, many Australians are confused about the real factors that increase their risk of cancer and the lifestyle choices they can make to decrease their risk,” Professor Olver said.

“For example, there is little evidence that taking vitamin supplements can reduce cancer risk, yet there is very strong evidence that eating a balanced diet and maintaining a healthy weight will reduce your risk of getting cancer.”

Cancer Council Scientific Advisor and international carcinogens expert, Professor Bernard Stewart, said people often blamed unknown or unlikely environmental factors for cancer, such as deodorant and food additives, rather than proven carcinogens.

“At least a third of cancers can be avoided through lifestyle choices, including not smoking, limiting alcohol, regular exercise, a healthy diet, maintaining a healthy weight, being SunSmart and getting checked for certain cancers at recommended ages,” Professor Stewart said.

iheard.com.au provides a simple way for the increasing number of Australians searching online to check the validity of claims made about cancer. Visitors can post questions with links to videos or articles about cancer and our experts will provide evidence-based answers.

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Galaxy poll findings for Cancer Council Australia

Cancer risks: Three in four (75%) associate at least one incorrect factor as increasing cancer risk.

Do these factors increase your risk of cancer?	Yes (Correct) %	No (Wrong) %
Being overweight	53	47
Defective genes	65	35
Drinking alcohol	47	53
Processed meat	31	69
Second hand smoke	71	29
Smoking	88	22
Solariums	68	32
	Yes (Wrong)	No (Correct)
Stress	54%	46%
Using deodorant	14%	86%

Cancer prevention: Three in four (76%) incorrectly associate some factors with preventing cancer risk which do not.

Do these factors help prevent cancer?	Yes (Correct) %	No (Wrong) %
Quit smoking	77	23
Protection from sun	77	23
Healthy eating	76	24
Maintain healthy weight	66	34
Regular health checks	65	35
Physical activity	63	37
Limit alcohol	55	45
	Yes (Wrong)	No (Correct)
Drinking plenty of water	50	50
Getting enough sleep	47	53
Positive thinking	43	57
Organic food	28	72
Taking vitamin supplements	24	76

* Galaxy Research. National online survey of 602 Australians aged 18 years and over conducted in May 2011. The data was weighted by age, gender and area to reflect ABS population estimates.