

Media Release

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200,000 cancers could be avoided over 25 years if Australians get active and maintain a healthy weight

World Cancer Day 4 February 2019

New Cancer Council Australia funded research has shown over 200,000 cancer cases could be avoided in Australia over the next 25 years if all Australian adults maintained a healthy weight and met the physical activity guidelines for cancer prevention.

The forecast, released this World Cancer Day (4 February), has prompted a call for Government to take stronger measures to help Australians live a healthier lifestyle.

The study, conducted by QIMR Berghofer Medical Research Institute, aimed to quantify the proportion of cancer cases that would be potentially avoidable if the prevalence of overweight/obesity and inactivity could be reduced in Australia.

Researchers found that if all Australian adults maintained a healthy weight, as many as 190,500 overweight/obesity-related cancers could be prevented over a 25-year period.

A further 19,200 inactivity-related cancers could also potentially be avoided if every Australian adult undertook at least five hours of moderate intensity physical activity per week.

Professor Sanchia Aranda, CEO Cancer Council Australia said, “With more than two thirds of adults considered overweight or obese, and nearly half insufficiently active, these results show we have the potential to prevent a significant number of cancers in Australia and potentially save thousands of lives.”

The cancers with the highest number of potentially avoidable cases in the study include postmenopausal breast, endometrium, bowel and kidney cancers.

Professor Aranda continued, “While it is important for people to look after themselves by doing regular physical activity and eating a balanced diet, Australia’s obesity problem cannot be placed entirely on the individual’s shoulders.

“In the lead up to the next federal election, both sides of politics need to recognise their responsibility to help protect children from mass marketing of junk food; improve the Health Star Rating food labelling system to provide simpler, more informed choices to consumers; and promote more public education about the benefits of good nutrition and exercise.”

Professor Aranda explained that individuals can also take steps to reduce their risk of lifestyle-related cancers.

“Improving your diet can be as simple as eating more fruit, vegetables and whole grains. An easy measure is the 2 & 5 goal – two fruits and five serves of vegetables every day. When it comes to physical activity, if you can’t commit to five hours of physical activity per week it’s important to remember that every little bit counts so making an effort to be more active each day can still lead to better health.”



World Cancer Day is an initiative of the Union for International Cancer Control (UICC) held on 4 February each year that raises awareness of cancer globally.

The study has been published in the *International Journal of Cancer*. It was funded by Cancer Council Australia and the National Health and Medical Research Council.

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Cancer Council Australia makes the following recommendations for nutrition and physical activity in support of the Dietary Guidelines for Australian Adults and the National Physical Activity Guidelines for Australians:

1. Aim for five hours of moderate physical activity each week, such as a brisk walk, recreational swimming, dancing or even pushing a stroller
2. Eat plenty of vegetables, legumes and fruit: five or more servings of vegetables and two or more servings of fruit per day
3. Make most of your cereals wholegrain
4. Eat meat in moderation - no more than three to four servings of, lean red meat each week and avoid processed meats
5. Select lower fat foods like lean meat and reduced-fat dairy products, and try using low-fat cooking methods like grilling instead of frying
6. Choose low-salt products - flavour foods with herbs and spices instead of salt

The journal article can be accessed via the following link on the *International Journal of Cancer* website: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/ijc.31943>

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