



April 7th, 2014

April is Cancer Month

While cancer mostly affects Canadian aged 50 and older, it can occur at any age. Canadian Cancer Society estimates indicate that 2 out of 5 Canadians (46% of men and 41% of women) will likely develop cancer during their lifetime. The good news is that even though the number of newly diagnosed cancer cases is increasing, the survival rates are also increasing. Of Canadians diagnosed with cancer, about 63% are expected to survive 5 years or more after diagnosis (according to 2006 to 2008 estimates).

Better screening techniques, greater public awareness of cancer warning signs, improvements in treatment options and continued cancer research are helping to improve our understanding of cancer's disease processes as well as survival rates.

Links between different cancers

There seems to be a link between the incidence of non-melanoma skin cancers and the development of other cancers. A study from Boston of over 170,000 health professionals demonstrated that people with basal cell carcinoma have a 15% risk of other cancers while those with squamous cell carcinoma had a 26% increased risk. Both men and women were at risk for melanoma, but women were also at greater risk for breast and lung cancers. Use sunscreen!

Is a PSA test an effective screening tool?

Routine PSA testing to screen for prostate cancer is controversial. This is because the test is not specific enough to detect only cancer – false positives can be caused by benign prostatic enlargement or infection. Often any cancers detected are so slow-growing, they would never be a factor in the man's life. As a result, many men are subjected to the significant side-effects of treatment unnecessarily. Experts say money would be better spent developing a better test.

Breastfeeding has benefits for mum too

We've all heard of the benefits to baby of breastfeeding, but researchers have found it benefits mom too! They studied the histories of women diagnosed with breast cancer between 2004 and 2009 and found that non-smokers who breastfed their babies developed cancer later, independent of other risk factors such as family history. Women who breastfed their babies for greater than 6 months staved off cancer 10 years longer than average.

Vaccine expected to reduce incidence of cervical cancer

Cervical cancer is the third most common gynecological cancer and one-third of women who develop it die as a result. It is often the result of HPV infection, so HPV vaccinations should improve the cervical cancer rate. Scientists are studying 2 drugs generally used for other purposes (one is an antifungal, the other is a blood treatment) that show promise in treating cervical cancer – especially if it is caught early, and that means regular pap tests.

A cancer diagnosis can be an overwhelming and frightening experience. You can talk to your pharmacist to help you wade through all the information, or visit <http://www.cancer.ca/>.