



CANCER AND SOUTH ASIANS

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

- Cancer begins in cells – the building blocks that form your body’s tissues. Normally, cells grow and divide to form new cells as the body needs them. When cells grow old, they die, and new cells take their place.
- Sometimes new cells form when the body does not need them. These extra cells can form a mass of tissue called a tumor.
- Tumors can be benign or malignant:¹
 - A benign tumor is not cancerous. It may grow in size but it does not spread to other parts of the body. Once removed, it usually does not grow back.
 - A malignant tumor is cancerous. It spreads to nearby parts of the body and can spread to other parts as well.
- For South Asians living in the U.S., cancer is one of the leading causes of death.²

RISK FACTORS FOR CANCER

While there are a number of different types of cancer, many risk factors – especially those that can be modified or prevented are as follows:

- Use of alcohol, tobacco, paan, or bidi’s.
- Some viruses and bacteria (such as Hepatitis B virus, Human immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), and Human Papilloma Virus, Helicobacter pylori).
- Certain kinds of diets (such as high fat).
- Environmental exposures (chemicals such as asbestos and arsenic).
- Sunlight (UV) exposure.
- Genetic factors (such as family history).

SCREENING TESTS FOR CANCER³

- While prostate cancer screening is still recommended in men, guidelines are being reviewed at this time.

- There are differences in rates of screening of South Asians in the U.S. For example, South Asian women in the U.S. have much lower rates of getting checked for cervical cancer than the general population.⁴

WHAT CAN YOU DO

- Talk to your health care provider about your risk factors for cancer and to get screened.
- If you use tobacco, quit smoking and avoid the use of other forms of tobacco.
- Eat healthier – including less fat, less cholesterol, and less ghee and increase your fiber through fresh fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.
- Live healthier by getting more exercise on a regular basis (at least 30 minutes per day at least 5 times per week).
- If you drink alcohol, do so in moderation (at most 1 drink per day for women, at most 2 drinks per day for men).
- Avoid excessive sun and other types of environmental exposures without appropriate protection.
- Discuss the issue of cancer with your loved ones and community members to increase awareness about this important issue and how it can impact South Asians.



RESOURCES

National

American Cancer Society
Phone: (800) 227-2345
Website: www.cancer.org

National Cancer Institute
Phone: (800) 422-6237
Website: www.cancer.gov/cancer

South Asian Women's Network
Website: <http://sawnet.org/health/#Cancer>

California

SAATH
Phone: (866) 459-8474
Website: www.saathusa.org

Illinois

Asian Human Services Inc.
Phone: (773) 728-2235
Website: www.ahschicago.org/community_health.htm

Maryland

Asian American Health Initiative
Phone: (240) 777-4517
Website:
www.aahiinfo.org/english/programs/progCancerInit.php

New York

NYU Center for the Study of South Asian American Studies
Phone: (212) 263-3072
Website: <http://asian-health.med.nyu.edu>

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¹ Ethnomed. Available at: <http://ethnomed.org/patient-education/cancer/general-cancer/general-cancer-eng.pdf/view>
Accessed 19 August 2010.

² National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS), Health U.S., 2006, Table 31. Available at:
[www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/06.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/hus/06.pdf). Accessed 24 August 2010.

³ Screening Tests for Cancer Prevention. Available at:
www.cancer.org/Healthy/FindCancerEarly/CancerScreeningGuidelines/american-cancer-society-guidelines-for-the-early-detection-of-cancer. Accessed 18 August 2010.

⁴ Pap Tests and Foreign-Born Women Podcast. Available at: www2c.cdc.gov/podcasts/player.asp?f=7325.
Accessed 20 August 2010.

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While every effort has been made to verify information provided, the authors and SAPHA are not liable for errors or omissions. Readers are advised to consult a health care provider before diagnosing, managing, or treating any health problem. Readers should not use this information in place of the judgment of a treating health care provider.

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