

## Ayurveda - Health notes

### Cancer

Below is the text of an interview with Dr. Hari Sharma, this outlines in detail the Ayurvedic perspective on cancer. Although many of the statistics refer to America, they no doubt reflect the situation in Ireland.

Total Health News brings you an insightful interview with Hari Sharma, M.D., pre-eminent author, scientist and researcher, on The Answer to Cancer, a new book written by him in conjunction with ayurvedic expert Rama Kant Mishra and with James G. Meade and published by Select Books.

**Total Health News:** **What prompted you to undertake this project of writing a book on cancer-prevention?**

**Dr. Sharma:** The present state of Western medicine does not involve prevention. At best, early detection is encouraged through mammograms, Pap tests, prostate screenings, etc. However, all the information available suggests that the majority of cancers are, in fact, preventable. It is estimated that 60-70% of cancers can be averted by implementing simple changes in one's diet and lifestyle. Why wait until cancer attacks when you can easily make sure the disease never gets a chance to start? For this reason we have written a how-to book of easy, uncomplicated steps that anyone can use to modify his or her diet and lifestyle. Small changes that prevent cancer and also promote overall health and well-being.

**Total Health News:** **Give us some statistics on cancer in America today.**

**Dr. Sharma:** According to the American Cancer Society, men in the U.S. have a 1 in 2 chance of developing this dreaded disease in their lifetime. Women are slightly better off, with a 1 in 3 chance of falling victim to cancer. There are 8.9 million Americans living with cancer today. In the 12 years between 1990 and 2002, doctors diagnosed 16 million cancer cases in the U.S. An estimated 555,000 Americans are expected to die of cancer in 2002, more than 1,500 a day.

According to the recent reports from the federal health agencies and the American Cancer Society, it is predicted that the number of Americans diagnosed with cancer each year will double within the next 50 years, due to more people living long enough to develop the disease. The number of cancer patients that are 85 years and older is expected to increase fourfold within this same time period. The good news is that death rates from cancer continue to fall, about 1% throughout the late 1990s.

According to the National Institutes of Health estimates, cancer is costing the U.S. \$157 billion a year. The cancer burden is rising and will strain Medicare. The numbers are quite mind-numbing, but it's important to make clear that we are addressing an epidemic here and not just some minor complaint. The figures are similar around the world.

For smokers, the American Cancer Society offered these sobering numbers in a 1996 publication:

- \* Chance of dying in single airline trip: 1 in 815,000
- \* Chance of dying in a skydiving jump: 1 in 96,296
- \* Chance of being killed in a car accident before his/her 65th birthday: 1 in 143
- \* Chance that smoking will kill him/her by the age of 65: 1 in 5

In 2002 it is estimated that approximately 1.3 million new cancer cases will be diagnosed. The main categories are as follows:

- \* Breast cancer: 205,000
- \* Prostate cancer: 189,000

- \* Lung cancer: 169,400
- \* Colon cancer: 107,300
- \* Skin cancer: 58,300

**Total Health News:**

**Those are disturbing numbers. What would you consider top risk factors?**

**Dr. Sharma:**

Cancer generally develops slowly, over a period of ten years or more, and it can arise from a single factor or a combination of factors. The three major risk factors for developing cancer are smoking, alcohol, and diet. Most people are aware that smoking is linked to cancer. However, they may not realize that it is linked to one-third of all cancer deaths in the United States. Alcohol increases the chances of getting cancer of the mouth, larynx, throat, esophagus, pancreas, and liver. Alcohol, in combination with smoking, heightens the risk of developing cancer of the digestive and urinary tracts. Young women who consume alcohol and are on estrogen-containing birth control pills are at a higher risk of developing breast cancer. Estrogen causes breast cells to divide. The young cells are more susceptible to the damage caused by free radicals generated by alcohol. Alcohol is a potent generator of free radicals, which are implicated in damage to the DNA that can result in initiation and promotion of cancer formation.

In the area of diet, high-fat foods can increase the chances of getting cancer (e.g. colon, rectum, prostate, endometrium). Cancer develops frequently if you eat too many smoked, cured, pickled, or charred foods. Some sources are also linking sugar to cancer. Cancer cells thrive on sugar. By using more sugar, the cancer cells produce lactic acid, which seems to help the body produce new blood vessels. This, in turn, helps the cancer to spread. Sugar also weakens the immune system and increases insulin, which causes cells to reproduce quickly. This can contribute to more rapid growth of the cancer.

Being overweight is a risk factor for cancer. Those who are 40% overweight have a much higher risk of developing colon, breast, prostate, gallbladder, ovarian, and uterine cancers.

Some risk factors for cancer come from within the body. Hormones, immune conditions, and inherited mutations disrupt normal functioning of the DNA. The female hormone estrogen may contribute to breast cancer, as I mentioned, as well as other cancers in women. Some cancers appear to run in families. The environment also poses risks, e.g. pollution, excessive exposure to sunlight, radiation, pesticides, chemical carcinogens, asbestos, arsenic, etc.

**Total Health News:**

**With so many diverse factors involved, does a prevention-based approach really reduce the risk?**

**Dr. Sharma:**

Yes, prevention really works. According to the American Cancer Society, prevention works in a startlingly high percentage of cases, as high as 60%. But the percentage could even be higher, perhaps even as high as 90%. A prevention-based approach focuses on the overall well-being of the body and mind. Instead of worrying about what carcinogen is affecting your skin or what drug has the least side effects, prevention allows a person to concentrate on feeling good and increasing his or her immunity. You focus on building a stronger physiology so that not only cancer but many other illnesses and diseases are no longer a threat. And all this can be achieved through gentle, easy steps that pale in comparison to the overwhelming bombardment of chemotherapy, radiation, and surgery.

Prevention is basically disregarded in Western medicine. The main emphasis is on treatment of cancer (i.e. chemotherapy, radiation, and surgery). What is considered 'prevention' is actually early detection, e.g. mammogram, Pap test, prostate specific antigen, and tests for colon and rectal cancer in those over the age of 50. However, Western medicine does provide a few guidelines for prevention that are helpful:

- \* Don't smoke
- \* Be moderate in drinking alcohol
- \* Eat fruits, vegetables, and whole grains

- \* Avoid high-fat foods, especially from animal sources.

**Total  
Health  
News:**

**What would be the components of a prevention-based approach, e.g. diet, lifestyle, herbs, etc.?**

**Dr. Sharma:** The simple and powerful prevention-based approach is multifaceted. It can be summarized as follows:

- a)** Diet and digestion: Eat a diet that is rich in natural cancer-fighting chemicals. Add beneficial spices to your diet to fight cancer. Avoid the toxic load to the physiology that makes the body susceptible to cancer. Keep digestion working properly to enhance immunity, build up beneficial chemicals, and reduce toxin accumulation. Reduce sugar intake.
- b)** Enhance immunity by simple lifestyle changes, such as sleeping at the right time, reducing stress, emphasizing positive emotions, etc.
- c)** Avoid smoking, alcohol, and environmental pollutants. Detoxify your system using easy methods.
- d)** Add herbal formulations when necessary, to aid digestion, improve sleep, enhance immunity, etc.
- e)** Bring harmony and peace into your life through meditation. The Transcendental Meditation(r) technique has been shown in numerous research studies to positively influence the physiology.

In this new book, *The Answer to Cancer*, we describe the components of a healthy diet, including several simple recipes. We also have a section on various foods that should be avoided, and a list of 'contradictory foods' that should not be eaten at the same time. Herbal preparations that help improve digestion and boost immunity are also mentioned.

If the diet is not proper or the digestion is poor, it results in the accumulation of partially digested food in the body. This partially digested food, in association with bile from the gall bladder and the bowel bacteria, results in the formation of what ayurveda calls 'ama' or 'toxins.' These toxic materials are absorbed in the physiology and, over time, block different channels in the body through which essential nutrients flow. Environmental toxins that we encounter also react with these absorbed toxins, resulting in very powerful toxic material that can initiate the cancerous process and cause other serious problems in the body. Thus, it is essential that our diet is proper, digestion is optimal, and toxins are removed from the body.

There are a large number of toxins we are exposed to in our day-to-day life. Some examples are:

- \* Industrial toxins: lead, arsenic, DDT, aluminum
- \* Mercury (from old dental fillings)
- \* Pollution from water: chlorine, fluoride, gasoline solvents
- \* Nicotine, carbon monoxide, and other harmful toxins from smoking
- \* Steroids such as cortisone used in cattle
- \* Bovine growth hormone fed to cows and present in milk
- \* Alcohol, caffeine, food additives

Due to the harmful effects of the various internal and external toxins we encounter, it is crucial that we detoxify our physiology. In the book, we have described a multifaceted approach to detoxification. The easy methods we describe include Vedic yoga and breathing exercises. Both of these enhance digestion, improve energy, purify and improve the functioning of the nervous system, and assist in cancer prevention. Another easy and effective technique for detox is abhyanga-the daily sesame oil massage. It is revitalizing and it neutralizes free radicals. We give a step-by-step method for giving yourself this sesame oil massage. We also discuss the herbs Licorice and Indian Sarsaparilla, which are excellent blood purifiers, and the herbal formulation called Detox-Pitta, which helps liver metabolism,

blood purifiers, and the herbal formulation called Detox-Pitta, which helps liver metabolism, digestion, and elimination.

**Total Health**      **Where does ayurveda fit into a prevention program?**

**Dr. Sharma:** Ayurveda translates as the 'Science of Life' and it is strongly prevention-oriented. Ayurveda recommends 'Heyam dukam anagatam' which translates as

**Total Health**      **Are there any Maharishi Ayurveda formulations that you would consider particularly important in a prevention program? Why?**

**Dr. Sharma:** In our book, we mention several herbal mixtures and formulations that are very useful in purifying the body, improving digestion, enhancing immunity, helping

**Total Health**      **How is the book organized? What are some of the topics you cover?**

**Dr. Sharma:** The book is written in a simple, light-hearted tone so that everyone can benefit from it. We have focused on a broad audience and therefore avoided technical

of life, e.g. diet, sleep, immunity, detoxification, yoga, etc. We even explain ways to reduce chemotherapy toxicity.

**Total  
Health  
News:**

**Let's discuss some topics from the book in a little more depth - you mentioned earlier that excess sugar can increase the risk of cancer.**

**Dr.  
Sharma:**

Everybody loves sugar and sugar-rich foods like candy, cookies, ice cream, chocolate, etc. The average American eats 150 grams of sugar a day. That's about one-third of a pound of sugar. The problem with eating a lot of sugar is that cancer cells love it. They can't metabolize fat nearly as well as sugar. They suck up 3 to 5 times more glucose (the technical name for the sugar your body uses) than normal cells. Cancer cells also prevent normal cells from utilizing glucose. The result is that the patient gets cachexia (loss of skeletal muscle mass) and hyperglycemia (high levels of sugar in the blood, because normal cells are prevented from using it and the cancer cells can't eat all of it). The increased consumption of glucose also causes cancer cells to produce lactic acid. This creates an acidic environment where cancer cells grow faster.

Sugar has been linked to several different types of cancer. Experiments involving mice showed that sugar assists in the development of liver cancer. Mice with lots of sugar also developed mammary tumors. Colon cancer has also been linked to high sugar. In addition, sugar decreases the number of neutrophils (disease-fighting immune cells) in the body, thereby decreasing your immunity.

In the book, we talk about simple techniques to get rid of sugar craving and the herbs that are useful in achieving this goal. We recommend an herb called *Gymnema sylvestre*. It takes away the taste of sugar and blocks receptors, preventing your intestinal tract from using the sugar. The sugar then passes out of the body instead of going into the bloodstream. We recommend Be Trim tea, which contains *Gymnema* and other herbs, to help develop a stronger will to resist sweet foods.

**Total  
Health  
News:**

**You discuss the spice turmeric in the book at some length.**

**Dr.  
Sharma:**

Turmeric is the queen of spices. It is ayurveda's top candidate for the world's best anti-cancer herb. Scientific studies have shown that turmeric protects the DNA of the cells, stimulates detoxifying enzymes, has anti-inflammatory properties, increases the anti-cancer properties of other phyto-chemicals (plant chemicals), and has a host of other beneficial properties. We discuss how to use this spice to achieve the maximum benefit in both cooking and everyday use. A recipe for 'Immunity Mix,' a potent combination of turmeric and other readily available spices, is also included in the book.

**Total  
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News:**

**Lifestyle is also an important component of prevention. What have you discussed in terms of lifestyle changes in this book?**

**Dr.  
Sharma:**

Let's talk about sleep. The lack of sleep and proper rest is rampant in our society. According to an estimate from the National Sleep Foundation, drowsiness during work-time is costing us \$18 billion a year in lost productivity. If we get enough rest our productivity will improve, but more importantly, sleep can help prevent cancer. Small molecules called cytokines build up in the body throughout the day, in response to toxins that accumulate as you fatigue. One of the most important of these is Interleukin-2, a well-known anti-cancer commando that is used in certain cancer treatments. Interleukin-2 increases significantly during sleep. It attaches to errant cells, such as cancer cells, and guides cancer-destroying immune cells (e.g. T-cells and NK cells - Natural Killer cells) directly to them. Another cytokine, called tumor necrosis factor, increases ten-fold during sleep and has been found to kill tumor cells. The hormone melatonin is another beneficial substance that increases during sleep. Melatonin is a great free radical fighter. During the deepest sleep, the body also secretes

is a great free radical fighter. During the deepest sleep, the body also secretes the hormone prolactin, which gets the immune cells doing an even better 'search and destroy' job on toxins sneaking around the body.

According to Vedic Medicine, if you don't sleep well, you build up ama (toxins) in the body, which clogs the system. If you sleep well, you build up a nice quantity of ojas, the vital force that literally strengthens the underlying basis of DNA - pure consciousness. The better you sleep, the more ama you clean out and the more ojas you produce. The best time to go to bed is by 10 p.m. A little warm milk before bed helps in falling asleep. Adding some poppy seeds to your diet has a gentle, relaxing effect. We also provide a recipe for a Date Milk Shake, which is very helpful for sleep. If your mind is just too jazzed, we recommend taking an herbal preparation called Blissful Sleep. It contains Indian Valerian, known for its soothing effect; Muskroot, which has a calming effect; and Winter Cherry, to balance the mind and emotions. There are a lot of other helpful tips given in the book for having an enjoyable and refreshing night's sleep.

In the book, we also talk about chemotherapy and how to reduce its toxic effects. Some of chemo's side effects are:

- \* Nausea and vomiting
- \* Fatigue
- \* Anemia, infection, bleeding
- \* Mouth sores
- \* Diarrhea, constipation
- \* Problems with nerves and muscles
- \* Tingling and burning, weakness and numbness in hands and feet, etc.

We discuss an herbal mixture called Amrit. This mixture contains potent phytochemicals and has many beneficial properties, without any toxic side effects. Research has shown that it decreases the toxic effects of chemotherapy in cancer patients. This herbal mixture has also been shown to decrease tumor formation and its spread under experimental conditions, in the areas of breast cancer, lung cancer, liver cancer, neuroblastoma (a tumor of the nervous system), and melanoma. The book goes into detail about the research conducted on Amrit and we give instructions on how to take it. We also address other ways to keep in balance while undergoing chemotherapy, including a veggie diet, meditation, proper sleep, sesame oil massage, Vedic exercises (yoga), and proper breathing.

**Total  
Health  
News:**

**Dr.  
Sharma:**

**It sounds like an amazingly comprehensive program for preventing cancer and staying healthy. Thank you, Dr. Sharma.**

It was a pleasure.