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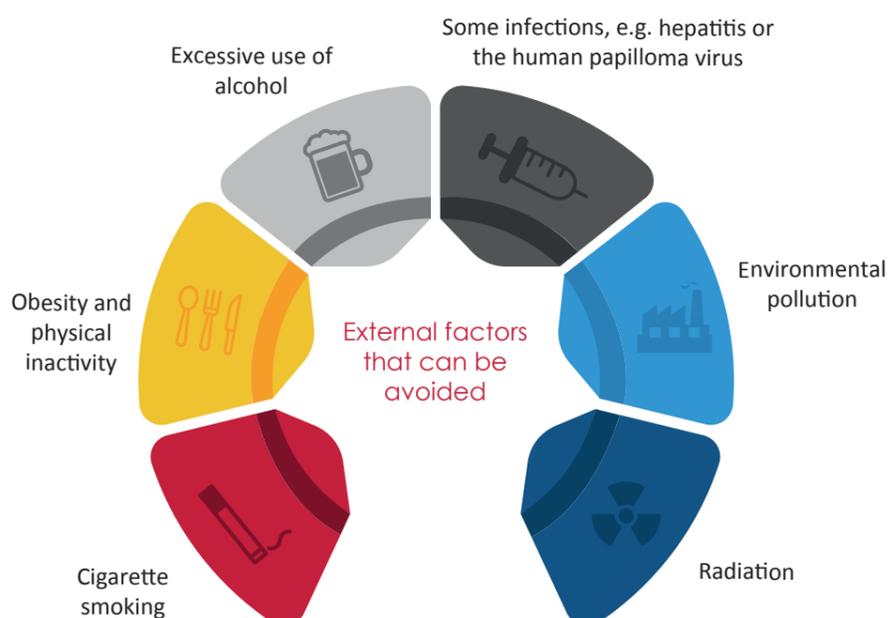
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What are some of the symptoms?



How can it be prevented?



Questions

for Dr Thapelo Motshudi

1 What is cancer?

Cancer is the name given to a group of related diseases involving abnormal cell growth with the potential to invade or spread to other parts of the body. Many people think that cancer is one condition, when in fact there are over 200 different kinds of cancer. It is for that reason that it is not possible to have one treatment that can cure all cancers. Cancers are generally named after the part of the body where they originate. The common cancers are those of the breast and cervix in women, and prostate and colon cancers in men.

2 How is it diagnosed?

Most cancers are initially recognized either through the appearance of symptoms or screening tests. These symptoms and screenings need to be followed by a proper diagnosis which requires the removal of a tissue sample, called a biopsy. The samples are sent to a laboratory for a pathologist to confirm the diagnosis and classify the type of cancer. It is also critical to determine the stage of the cancer, which is the degree to which the tumour spread from where it originated. The diagnosis will assist the Oncologist, Pathologists and Radiologist in guiding the treatment and management of the patient.

3 What are some of the symptoms?

Cancer can cause many different symptoms dependant on the affected area and the extent of disease. These can include unexplained weight loss, appetite loss, change in bowel habits, excessive tiredness, nausea, vomiting, difficulty in passing urine and many others. Most often, these symptoms are not due to cancer and are often caused by other problems. Should symptoms persist for a couple of weeks, it would be important to consult your doctor.

4 How can it be prevented?

Many things in our lives may increase or decrease our risk of getting cancer. Some people are born with genes that increase their risk of developing cancer. However, a significant number of cancers can be prevented by making better lifestyle choices. There are external factors that can increase your risk of developing cancer, and avoiding them can be life-saving:

- Cigarette smoking
- Obesity and physical inactivity
- Excessive use of alcohol
- Some infections, e.g. hepatitis or the human papilloma virus
- Environmental pollution
- Radiation

There are also certain working environments that can expose a person to chemicals and substances that cause cancer. In these situations, it is important that the appropriate safety measures are taken.

5 How is it treated?

Treatment depends on the type of cancer, and can involve one or a combination of treatments such as surgery, chemotherapy and radiation therapy. The type of treatment can also depend on whether the cancer has spread to other organs, where it is in the body, and the patient's needs. In cases where the cancer is advanced and has spread widely throughout the body, the patient may be offered palliative care, which is to improve quality of life through supportive care and pain management. Currently there is no medical evidence to support claims that alternative remedies are better than conventional treatments to treat cancer, or even that they can offer any form of treatment.

Cancer treatment is led by a multidisciplinary team, which includes nurses, general practitioners, psychologists, radiation and medical oncologists, surgeons, radiologists, pathologists, and many other health professionals. It is important to have good social support which can include romantic partners, family, work colleagues, friends, and cancer support groups.

An important part of coping with a cancer diagnosis is recognizing emotions and feelings. While there is no evidence to support the idea that a positive attitude can reduce the risk of cancer, keep cancer from coming back, or help the person with cancer live longer. A good support structure and positive attitude can be used to help reduce distress and cope with the emotions that come with a cancer diagnosis.