

Britons aware of links between lifestyle and cancer, but action is lacking

February 5 2015



More Britons than ever are aware of the links between lifestyle and cancer risk, according to a survey carried out by an international cancer prevention charity.

"As well as raising awareness of cancer [risk factors](#) it's important that we help people in making [lifestyle changes](#)" - Dr Julie Sharp, Cancer Research UK

But there is an apparent gap between "awareness and action", meaning the changes to lifestyle that could prevent many cancers, are not happening.

The World Cancer Research Fund is urging government, charities and health professionals to use the latest awareness figures as an opportunity to address how to support people in making healthier lifestyle choices.

Since 2010, the charity has been tracking [public awareness](#) of cancer risk factors, with smoking regularly topping the list (83 per cent in this year's poll).

But the latest survey, performed by YouGov, suggests that public awareness of risk factors other than smoking has also increased since 2010.

The survey found that:

- Nearly two thirds (62 per cent) of Britons know that being overweight can increase cancer risk, up from 55 per cent since 2010;
- More than half (58 per cent) think there is a link between poor diet and increased cancer risk, the same as polling from 2010;
- Half (49 per cent) know about the importance of physical activity, the highest rating since WCRF began recording public opinion.

But there are also areas of concern in the level of public understanding, including:

- A substantial gap linked with social inequality, with people from higher social classes much more aware of the links between being overweight, eating a [poor diet](#) and physical inactivity and

cancer risk than the lower social classes.

- People born between 1981 and 1990 – so called 'millennials' – also appear less well informed about a range of cancer risks, including smoking (75 per cent). And fewer people think there is a link between alcohol and cancer risk (54 per cent), down from a high of 61 per cent recorded in 2012 despite strong evidence to the contrary.

But despite greater awareness, some Britons are still struggling to make the lifestyle changes that could help minimise their cancer risk. For example, Government figures indicate that UK citizens are eating too much saturated fat, sugar and salt while not eating enough fruit, vegetables and oily fish.

Dr Julie Sharp, Cancer Research UK's head of health information, said: "As well as raising awareness of [cancer risk factors](#) it's important that we help people in making lifestyle changes that will help reduce their risk and that public health initiatives support these efforts – so that more cancers can be prevented in the future."

Amanda McLean, Director of World Cancer Research Fund UK, said: "We are at a position now where we are fairly sure what the science is saying in terms of [lifestyle](#) and [cancer risk](#). We know that overweight and obesity are associated with nine separate cancers, including breast and prostate.

"And it seems that, overall, the public understands this too, although it is of concern that people from poorer backgrounds and 'millennials' seem to be less aware.

"It is good to know that people seem to be hearing the research message, but it is important we build on that awareness by working towards behaviour change actions that are realistic, achievable and will help

reduce the burden of preventable cancers in future."

Provided by Cancer Research UK

Citation: Britons aware of links between lifestyle and cancer, but action is lacking (2015, February 5) retrieved 6 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2015-02-britons-aware-links-lifestyle-cancer.html>

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