

Media Release

Australians encouraged to get active this World Cancer Day

Exercise a ‘wonder drug’, says Cancer Council Australia CEO

Saturday 4 February is World Cancer Day and Cancer Council Australia is joining organisations around the world to mark the event and encouraging Aussies to get physically active to reduce their cancer risk.

Cancer Council research shows that around 1,800 bowel, breast and endometrial cancers diagnosed each year in Australia are caused by physical inactivity.

Cancer Council Australia CEO and President of the Union for International Cancer Control, Professor Sanchia Aranda, says only around one in two Australians aged 18–64 meet the Australian physical activity guidelinesⁱ - “and that needs to change”.

“Smoking and UV radiation continue to cause the largest number of preventable cancer cases and remain major public health challenges,” Professor Aranda said. “However, awareness of the risks of smoking and of sun exposure has increased in recent years – and we are seeing gradual reductions in mortality from smoking-related cancers and melanoma as a result.

“Meanwhile, the rates of cancer caused by inactivity and the interactive risk factors of poor diet and high body weight are increasing. Unless we start improving our diets, getting active and maintaining a healthy body weight, we can expect an escalation in number of preventable cancers.”

Professor Aranda said around five hours of moderate exercise, or 150 minutes of vigorous exercise a week, can reduce your cancer risk.

“Any increase in activity can be beneficial,” Professor Aranda said. “As well as reducing your cancer risk, being active can help with everything from cardiovascular disease prevention to improved mental health. Regular exercise can also help cancer survivors reduce their risk of recurrence, maintain quality of life and help manage symptoms or side effects.

“If the multiple benefits of physical activity were captured in a pill, we’d call it a wonder drug.”

Professor Aranda said that while 1,800 preventable cancer cases in Australia each year were attributed just to inactivity, a further 3,900 cases were caused by high body mass, a risk factor that can also be reduced by being more active.

With World Cancer Day falling on a weekend, the UICC and Cancer Council Australia are encouraging Australians to get involved and show their support through sports, games and other organised activities.

“This year World Cancer Day falls on a Saturday, so it’s a natural opportunity for sporting clubs, athletes and fans to get together and talk about the seven simple steps we can all take to reduce our cancer risk and encourage physical activity.

“In Sydney, Cancer Council Australia will be the official charity partner for the Sydney 7s, part of the international HSBC Rugby Sevens World Series – as well as fundraising at the games we will be educating Australians about the fact that one in three cancer cases can be prevented.”

To reduce cancer risk, Cancer Council recommends:

- Quitting smoking
- Being SunSmart
- Maintaining a healthy weight

- Eating for health – including plenty of vegetables, fruit, fibre, moderate amounts of red meat and limiting processed meat intake
- Reducing your alcohol intake
- Being physically active
- Getting checked

World Cancer Day is a global initiative promoted by the Union for International Cancer Control.

This year's theme is #WeCanICan and aims to promote the things that individuals and communities can do to reduce the global cancer burden. For more information head to worldcancerday.org.au

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For interviews or audio grabs, contact Hollie Jenkins, Cancer Council Australia on 0400 762 010 or hollie.jenkins@cancer.org.au

About World Cancer Day sport-related activities and grassroots events

World Cancer Day is a global initiative. From Mexico to Malaysia, local and global associations around the globe such as The French Tennis Federation and World Wrestling Entertainment, are coming together to give a face to cancer prevention and show that "We Can. I Can." For more information about specific events, please visit: <http://www.worldcancerday.org/map>

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- i The ABS National Health Survey 2014-15 found that 55.5% of 18-64 year olds participated in sufficient physical activity in the last week (more than 150 minutes of moderate physical activity or more than 75 minutes of vigorous physical activity, or an equivalent combination of both, including walking).