

The power of the flower

Self Care health facts column

V.1374
2013

4 September 2013



Recently we celebrated Daffodil Day which was originally created by the Canadian Cancer Society in the 1950s and which has resulted in various cancer charities around the world now using daffodils as their fund raising symbol. In Australia Daffodil Day has become the largest national fund-raising event of its kind and the theme for 2013 is all about growing hope for a cancer-free future.

Coincidentally, the daffodil is the national flower of Wales, where it is grown commercially to produce the drug galantamine - used in the treatment of Alzheimers disease and other memory loss conditions.

Here, Daffodil Day also serves to highlight prevention and treatment strategies in regard to Australia's number one killer – cancer. Each year in Australia, more than 100,000 new cases of cancer are diagnosed (this is in addition to so-called non-melanoma skin cancer which accounts for about 440,000 extra cases) and more than 40,000 people every year will die from cancer. The number of cancer cases annually continues to grow; and by the age of 85, one in every two Australians will be directly affected by cancer.

The good news is that while cancer is on the increase, death rates are actually falling (survival rates for common cancers have risen by about 30%). More than half of all cancers can be successfully treated. However, not surprisingly, early diagnosis and treatment is critical. (Check out the Cancer Council Australia website for a list of early warning signs).

Excluding non-melanoma skin cancers, the most common cancers in Australia are prostate, colorectal (bowel), breast, melanoma and lung cancer.

Improved treatments for cancer have meant greatly improved health outcomes; but the greatest benefits will undoubtedly come from the introduction of more effective prevention strategies.

According to Cancer Council Australia, each year in Australia, more than 6000 deaths from cancer can be attributed to three major risk factors: inadequate intake of fruit and vegetables, inadequate physical activity and overweight and obesity.

Australian obesity levels tripled between 1985 and 1995. Now, just over 15 years later, the situation is worse with obesity among children a major concern. This places thousands of young Australians at risk of cancers, heart disease, stroke and diabetes.

The importance of cancer prevention by way of behaviour and lifestyle change is reinforced by research published in the Journal of the National Cancer Institute which shows that once cancer is diagnosed, modification of diet or the use of dietary supplements (such as vitamins or antioxidants) do not seem to alter the course of the disease.

Of course, tobacco is also a major cause of preventable disease. Unless current smokers quit, current death rates will continue.

Australia has been a world leader in tobacco control; the plain packaging of cigarettes is just one of the more recent initiatives. But still thousands of people are dying prematurely as a result of active and passive smoking. Tobacco is the only consumer product which, when used as directed, kills half of its consumers.



Photo by Bev Lloyd-Roberts

So, a few simple lifestyle changes can make a huge difference to your health long term. For some helpful hints on how to quit smoking for good, ask for the Staying a Non-Smoker fact card from one of the 1500 Self Care Pharmacies around Australia – pharmacies providing the Pharmaceutical Society's Self Care health information.

You can call 1300 369 772 for the nearest location or log onto the website www.psa.org.au and click on "Self Care" then "Find a Self Care Pharmacy". Fat and Cholesterol, Weight and Health, Fibre and Bowel Health, Prostate Problems and Sense in the Sun are some other titles in the series that can help you stay healthy longer.