

Providing care, support and education about cancer

For more than 80 years, the Cancer Association of South Africa (CANSA) has provided care and support to those affected by cancer, while also educating the public and advocating a healthy, balanced lifestyle for all.

Since July 1931, The Cancer Association of South Africa (CANSA) has been playing a leading role in cancer research and cancer control policy development, as well as providing care, support and education to South Africans affected by this dread disease. CANSA's purpose is to lead the fight against cancer in South Africa. Its mission is to be the preferred non-profit organisation that enables research, educates the public and provides support to all people affected by cancer.

CANSA has steadily developed a comprehensive service to the public, making a positive difference to thousands of South Africans affected by cancer. It relies heavily on corporate donors, cash donations and volunteerism to fund its health, care and support programmes, advocacy initiative, and research initiatives.

According to Elize Joubert, CEO of CANSA, one of the organisation's most extraordinary achievements in its more than 80 years of operation is "establishing a community of people, affected by the dread disease in one way or another, who work together to raise

funds and get work done. These include cancer survivors, caregivers, medical and research professionals, sponsors, and the general public who never cease to surprise us with their generosity and participation in our national and regional events."

Some of the main events include the CANSA Shavathon, CANSA Relay for Life, Cuppa for CANSA and various sporting events that are supported by extensive marketing and promotion, all aimed at creating awareness and influencing behaviour.

A balanced lifestyle is linked to cancer risk

CANSA advocates living a balanced, healthy lifestyle by making smart food choices, doing regular exercise, maintaining a healthy weight, and avoiding tobacco and alcohol. A recent study by the World Cancer Research Fund International has confirmed the link between obesity and 11 cancers. These findings emphasise the huge role that obesity plays in increasing cancer risk. Nutrition, physical activity and body composition all play a central part in cancer risk reduction.

Eat smart

"Maintaining a healthy weight, and watching your food (sugar, salt, alcohol, red meat, etc.) intake is so important to your health. It is proven that obesity can cause disease such as cancer," says CANSA's Clinical Health Specialist Prof Michael Herbst.

Reading food labels can help ensure a healthier lifestyle as the labels make one aware of portion sizes and kilojoules. But, be aware that 'low-fat' or 'non-fat' does not necessarily mean 'low-kilojoule'. Look out for food products that carry a CANSA Smart Choice Seal of Recognition as this can assist in making an informed choice.



“Limiting red meat and processed meat (bacon, sausage, lunch meats and hot dogs) consumption is also important for a balanced lifestyle. Rather choose fish, poultry, beans, legumes and pulses instead of red meat. Eat at least five portions of seasonal fruits and vegetables daily, and drink plenty of clean, safe water,” continues Herbst.

The use of tobacco products (including hubbly bubbly) is harmful to a person's health and can lead to cancer and other diseases. CANSA assists and encourages quitting tobacco use. Abstaining from alcohol can also assist in healthier living.

Knowing sugar – CANSA and the sugar tax

CANSA encourages the public to lower their sugar intake. High sugar consumption elevates insulin levels, increases kilojoule intake without any nutrient value, and indirectly increases cancer risk by promoting obesity. Major sources of added sugars (sugars and syrups that are added to food during processing and preparation) include soft drinks, cakes, biscuits, pies, fruit punch, dairy desserts, sweets and chocolates, as well as some sports drinks. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), sugar intake should not include more than 10% of a person's daily energy requirements.

In South Africa, the problem of obesity has grown over the past 30 years resulting in the country being ranked the most obese country in sub-Saharan Africa. CANSA, as part of the South African NCD Alliance, supports the indirect taxation on sugar-sweetened

beverages (SSBs) with the aim of reducing their consumption as laid out in the recommendations of the Policy Paper. It has been proven in countries where sugar tax was introduced, that it led to the reduction in consumption of sugary beverages.

Be proactive

It is helpful to know your family history and cancer risk. “Knowing your body, means you are able to recognise changes and unusual symptoms. This will help you to know when something strange is occurring in your body and when to seek professional medical help,” says Herbst.

It is important to do regular self-examination for breast and testicular cancers. CANSA Mobile Health Clinics and CANSA Care Centres also offer some cancer screening. Contact the local CANSA Care Centre to see what screening is available. In addition, it is also advised to go for regular check-ups and cancer screening tests at a medical practitioner.

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