

# Mitra Sandesh

February 1, 2024

## I CAN & I WILL

Cancer is a word that can stir up many fears and emotions, but making sure you fully understand your diagnosis in discussion with an expert oncologist can help you to regain control of the situation. Often, communicating with a doctor might feel challenging, as the subject of a cancer diagnosis is always a heavily loaded one. Both the person and the doctor might find it difficult to communicate efficiently.

Depression and anxiety are often a natural outcome after receiving a cancer diagnosis. Connecting to professional support groups can help clarify and close the gaps in your understanding.



## CAN LIFESTYLE CHANGES PREVENT CANCER?

**Dr. Vaishnavi Joshi, MBBS, MD, DNB, MRCP(SCE) (UK)**

Consultant Medical Oncology & Haemato-Oncology  
Aster CMI Hospital, Bangalore

**Mitra Cancare has completed 2 years** since its establishment in January 2024. One of the first events of the year was a webinar conducted on the topic "Can Lifestyle Changes Prevent Cancer?" on 27th January 2024. Dr. Vaishnavi Joshi, Medical Oncologist at Aster CMI Hospital, Bengaluru was the guest and she spoke about Cancer Myths and Lifestyle Modifications that can prevent cancer.

With cancer becoming so common nowadays, it is more like a chronic lifestyle disease. However, despite advancements in treatments and increasing survival rates, awareness about cancer is poor. She pointed out that more than 70-80% patients consult doctors when the disease is progressed and recovery is poor at that stage. Stigma and lack of awareness were the most cited reasons for not seeking early treatment. Late detection is the cause for most deaths caused by cancer in India, and 50% of cancers are from lifestyle factors such as tobacco use, sedentary lifestyle, obesity, and infections.

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There are many myths about cancer which further prevent early detection. Most people think cancers are incurable and not worth the treatment. They think because they are young, it cannot be cancer, and continue to self-medicate or ignore their symptoms until later stages. Some think that they do not have a genetic history, or do not have any bad habits therefore they are not at risk. All these factors cause them to ignore preventive health measures such as routine screening.

Lifestyle modifications can go a long way in preventive healthcare. Dr. Vaishnavi shared simple tips that are native to any Indian household, such as eating a well-balanced meal, including plant-based food sources, eating in moderation, and staying active. She also emphasized to eat local and regionally available food, along with regular exercise routines. Move more and eat smart was her mantra. Including more vegetables, fruits, whole grains, and fibre rich foods, while limiting red meat, processed food, barbecued meat, refined foods, and sugars was a good protocol to follow. Avoiding extreme food fads and taking supplements only when prescribed would be a safer bet. Limiting exposure to nicotine and alcohol can also protect an individual to a significant extent.

Therefore, cultivating healthy habits is a must. She also mentioned about obesity and sedentary lifestyle being the new tobacco that was killing more people and posing greater threat to one's health. She suggests regular exercise of at least 30-40mins for about 4-5 times a week can protect an individual against the development of cancers. Despite all this, we are not completely free from the risk of developing cancer.

A majority of cancers have idiopathic causes. We need to undergo health checks and screening regularly. Mammograms for breast cancer, Pap smears for cervical cancer, low dose CT scans for lung cancer, Serum PSA testing for prostate cancer and many more preventive screening methods can be employed to ensure an individual is diagnosed at an earlier stage and has a better prognosis.

Dr. Vaishnavi patiently answered the questions asked by the audience. Her take home message was to be equipped with the right awareness, maintain healthy diet, sleep and exercise routines, manage stress levels, avoid smoking/ alcohol intake, partake in regular screening and most importantly consult a doctor when any symptoms arise.

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## Mitra Article



### CANCER SURVIVORSHIP IN INDIA: NAVIGATING CHALLENGES AND EMBRACING HOPE

**Dr. Swaroop**

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Cancer survivorship in India is a dynamic journey marked by both triumphs and challenges. As the country witnesses an increasing number of individuals overcoming this formidable disease, the landscape of survivorship reflects the need for comprehensive support, awareness, and tailored healthcare services.

Survivorship begins at the moment of diagnosis, as individuals embark on a path that extends beyond treatment completion. In India, the journey is often shaped by cultural nuances and societal perceptions surrounding cancer. While survivorship is a reason to celebrate, survivors frequently grapple with the stigma associated with the disease. World Cancer Day in India, observed annually on February 4th, serves as an important platform to shed light on the unique aspects of cancer survivorship within the country.

One significant challenge in the Indian context is the limited access to specialized survivorship care. After completing treatment, survivors often face a lack of dedicated follow-up programs, survivorship clinics, and rehabilitation services. Integrating survivorship care into the broader healthcare system is crucial to address the diverse needs of survivors, including physical, emotional, and psychosocial aspects.

Financial constraints pose another hurdle for cancer survivors in India. The high cost of cancer treatment, coupled with potential loss of income during treatment, can lead to long-term financial strain. World Cancer Day becomes an opportunity to advocate for policies that ease the economic burden on survivors, ensuring they can access necessary support without compromising their financial stability.

Despite these challenges, the narrative of cancer survivorship in India is evolving. Survivorship awareness campaigns, community support groups, and initiatives by non-governmental organizations are playing a vital role in fostering a sense of community among survivors. These efforts not only break the silence surrounding cancer but also empower survivors to navigate their journey with resilience and optimism.

In the realm of survivorship, mental health deserves special attention. The emotional toll of cancer, coupled with the challenges of survivorship, necessitates accessible mental health services. World Cancer Day serves as a reminder to prioritize mental health support for survivors and integrate it into the holistic care framework.

In conclusion, cancer survivorship in India is a testament to the strength of individuals who have faced the challenges posed by cancer. As the nation strives towards a future with a reduced cancer burden, it is imperative to prioritize survivorship care, raise awareness, and foster a supportive environment that empowers survivors to lead fulfilling lives post-cancer. World Cancer Day serves as a catalyst for change, encouraging a collective effort to enhance the quality of survivorship for individuals across India.

“ **Talk to people, who had been through cancer, they can help you navigate in rough waters.** ”

**Amar Bhaskar**