



## Turning off the Cancer Switch

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### Editorial

Few diseases present a greater challenge to medicine than cancer. There are more than a thousand types of cancers, with multiple gene combinations and countless variables that determine where it shows up, when, and to what degree of severity. Each year thousands of students enter medical school with the dream of curing cancer; each year thousands of physicians retire, knowing that while we have made incredible progress we still have a long, long way to go.

Cancer rates are dropping, which have led many to believe we are finally beginning to win the war; however, that is only partially correct. For while scientists have developed early detection methods (i.e. identifying certain genes that increase one's likelihood of getting it) that aid in prevention, the decline is mostly due to the realization that the majority of cancers are caused by controllable environmental and lifestyle factors. For example, at one point the most prevalent cancer was lung cancer, but as more and more people stopped smoking those rates dropped dramatically. Regulations that limit exposure to second-hand smoke (i.e. smoking bans on airplanes, in restaurants, and in other places of public gatherings, have also played a role in the decline in the number of lung cancers cases, thus in the overall numbers. Similarly, the discovery that asbestos, radiation, and toxic chemicals can cause cancer has led to laws banning or limiting these substances in the workplace, construction and so on.

That said, cancer still strikes one out of three women and one out of two men, and has overtaken heart disease as the number one killer. Medicine offers surgery, chemotherapy (poison), radiation (to burn), hormonal manipulation, and recently, immunotherapy to control the disease.

It is also big business, which provides a disincentive for the medical system to come up with a cure. There are approximately 300,000 cases of breast cancer yearly, with many patients needing mastectomy and breast reconstruction that adds up to about \$500,000 in individual and insurance costs. The total annual cost: \$150,000,000,000 annually - and that is just one type of cancer!

I have always been disinclined to study cancer, as I see it as a medical emergency situation. There were a few books, however, that opened my eyes to the history of the disease (it has been recorded and studied nearly as long as we've walked the earth) and possibilities for the future.

In his award-winning book *The Emperor of All Maladies*, brilliant Columbia University oncologist Siddhartha Mukherjee explores humanity's long battle with cancer, including that of his own family. The book is so riveting that famed documentarian Ken Burns created a PBS special based on it, which aired in 2015. Mukherjee also exposed how certain patients were mistreated and maimed in the name of science. For example, for fifty years women suffered radical mastectomies that involved the cutting out of the shoulder girdle along with the breast, even after it became known that cancer is a systemic disease. Today, the standard practice is to first look for the primary site or tumor malignancy before jumping right to surgery.

Another excellent book, *The Cancer Code* by Dr. Jason Fung, provides a summary of cancer in layman's terms. One of the things that makes cancer unique is that is an "innate" disease, meaning that we all have the capacity to develop it. The triggers that set cancer in motion is an open discussion, but again, lifestyle choices certainly play a prominent role. Obesity, for example, has been strongly linked with diabetes and cancer, which are also linked with each other. Roughly 150 million adults in the US - roughly two-thirds of the population - are overweight and therefore at high risk for these diseases.

Like many people, I used to think of cancer as something that happens as a result of bad luck, genetic mutations, hidden/latent infections or toxic chemicals. Fung's book made me see things from a different perspective. If the seed of cancer exists in all of us, just waiting for the soil to be activated, perhaps there was some sort of switch I could flip to ensure that never happened.

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This realization or “intuitive flash” led to a pure strategy to prevent cancer. It’s not just nutrition, it’s not just trauma or emotional release, or the many other health procedures that help ward off the evil beast. Rather, it is something that takes the plug out of the socket, short-circuiting cancer before it has a chance to take hold.

And that is how, almost without even realizing it, I became another cog in the cancer-fight wheel. My hope is that in ten years, I will have enough data to share with other holistic practitioners, so they can help prevent cancer for their patients.