

Cancer- How to Understand, Fight, and Enjoy Life With

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What is Cancer

The following account of cancer is only for the layman. It is not meant to be medically complete and accurate description of the cancer disease.

Our human body (and all living organisms), made of tiny (approximately 64,000 cells lined up would occupy one inch) trillions of cells, is a beautiful, marvelous, and complex system beyond imagination. It is put together from a single cell, the fertilized egg. Each cell is an amazing world inside: it takes in nutrients, converts these nutrients into energy, throws out waste products, carries out specialized functions, and reproduces as necessary. Even more amazing is that each cell stores its own set of instructions for carrying out each of these and many other activities.

Each and every cell carries an internal program that tells it how and when to grow and die and associate with other neighboring cells to create this highly complex system of human body. There are several hundred types of cells in human body creating various tissues and organs. However, the cells in different parts of the body, as different as they appear, carry the same genetic information (called the genome) and descend from the same original single cell, the fertilized egg.

The genome, responsible for all the growth and functioning of the body, is present in the original fertilized egg and is then passed on, through cell division, to all the trillions of cells in the body without virtually any changes in it at all. One can compare it to building a house: first a blueprint of the house is needed and then brick by brick the whole house is constructed. A human cell is like brick.

These different types of cells read out instructions for their functioning and behavior from the same genetic code, present at the center of every cell. One of the most important tasks of any cell is to read from a particular gene of the whole genetic code that when it should divide to grow, and when it should stop growing and die. In most of human tissues, cells are continuously dying and being replaced. The genetic code contains approximately 50,000 genes (this number may change as we understand human genome in more detail) that control the lives of cells. Each gene is selected by a cell from this whole library of thousands of genes and read selectively by the cell for its functioning.

The whole genetic code is made of DNA (Deoxyribonucleic acid) molecules, which are composed in double helix structure by four types of molecules, A, C, G, and T, called the bases. Each base (A, C, G, and T) is a complex array of molecules. The sequence of bases is what makes a genetic code. In principle, any instruction (taken by the cell) is written in terms of the order of these bases (A, C, G, and T) in the DNA. These four letters have the capacity to encode an unlimited amount of information in the genetic code.

Thus the whole human genetic code can literally be compared with a huge recipe book containing millions of pages. It has 23 chapters (called Chromosomes), each chapter contains several thousand recipes (called Genes), each recipe is made of paragraphs (called Exons), each paragraph is made up of words (called Codons), and each word is made of letters (called Bases). There are about three to four billion bases in this genetic code recipe book. And this whole genetic code is put together at the center of the cell in a tiny space of only few microns (a micron is one-millionth of a meter) across.

The cancer is related to a small number of genes that tell an individual cell whether it should grow/divide or not. These genes, called *oncogenes*, reveal the origin of cancer and one day will lead us to completely cure this disease. The oncogene is capable of causing the cell and its descendants to grow without limits – that is cancer. A *proto-oncogene* is a normal gene that can become an oncogene due to mutations or damages caused by radiation, chemicals, or during the normal process of cell division.

Think about the recipe book where a particular dish is being prepared by reading the instructions from a particular page. If, for example, there are some mistakes on the page being read or some letters are damaged, what can happen to the dish? What if instead of 10 gram of salt, one reads it as 1 gram or 100 gram; or what if 10 minutes of cooking is misprinted as 100 minutes or 1 minute of cooking; one can imagine the consequences to the dish with such minor looking misprints, which will completely ruin the whole dish. If in the word “dear”, ‘r’ is misprinted as “d”, the word “dear will become “dead” a total disaster in its meaning.

The DNA sequences in a gene must be exactly copied and read by the cell. A single deletion or rearrangement of bases in a specific gene (*proto-oncogene*, for example) can convert a normal cell into a cancerous cell, meaning the cell keeps growing and dividing indefinitely without any control. Such tiny change(s) in the base sequences, known as the mutation, is sufficient to change the meaning of the entire gene. This change in the gene can be caused during the copying process (cell division), by radiation, or by certain chemicals (smoking, food, drugs, and pollution). Since there are trillions of cells in our body, the statistical chance of one cell becoming cancerous is so real that cancer can develop in our body even without any outer source (chemical, radiation, smoking), called *carcinogens*. In other words, every person on earth gets new cancer cells all the time, however, our immune system and certain genes easily and safely kill these new cancer cells.

Thus we can summarize the simple picture of cancer as follows: During the copying (dividing) process or due to a *carcinogen* (chemical or radiation), a *proto-oncogene* is damaged (called an *oncogene*). On almost trillions separate occasions, cells will go through their cycle of growth and division. Each of these trillions of divisions represents an opportunity for a disaster, i.e. a *proto-oncogene* becoming an *oncogene*. This cell will follow the abnormal or incorrect instructions from the *oncogene* and will keep growing by passing the same *oncogene* to its daughter cells, driving them into unrelenting growth and division.

Basically, cancer cell is essentially a cell out of control, because it does not communicate properly. Unlike normal cells, cancer cells continue to grow and divide out of control and do not die. These cancer cells group together and form tumors, destroying nearby healthy normal cells and tissues. With time, cancer cells can break from the original tumor and spread to other parts of the body and may form new tumors. The spread of a tumor to a new place in the body is called *metastasis*. Some cancers, like leukemia, do not form tumors. Instead, these cancer cells involve the blood and blood-forming organs, and circulate through other tissues where they grow. The actual causes of cancer are now known almost accurately, but, as mentioned earlier, it can be caused from food, radiation, smoking, stress, heredity, and certain chemicals. Cancer is not contagious. One cannot catch cancer from someone else who has it. Cancer isn't caused by germs, like colds or the flu. It is a genetically originated disorder of a cell's malfunction.

Different types of cancer behave very differently. For example, cancer in lung, breast, colon, kidney, and brain are very different diseases. They grow at different rates and respond to different treatments. That is why people with cancer need treatment that is aimed at their particular kind of cancer. Cancer is a leading cause of death worldwide. Almost 40% of the current population of United States will develop cancer at some point of their lives and almost half will die of the disease.

How to deal with the News of Cancer

When a person learns about his/her cancer for the first time, it comes as a big shock creating fear, anxiety, and stress. This the so called bad news can enhance other existing or new symptoms also such as blood pressure, heart problems, sleep disorders, diabetes, and more. In addition, when friends and relatives show their sympathy and concern, the person may feel even more down and helpless. Although, having support from friends and relatives is good, it should not be coming in terms of sympathy, dependence, pity, and unwanted instructions. Therefore, in the beginning or during the treatment, a cancer patient should ignore any sympathetic or advising words from friends or beloved ones.

It is, therefore, quite important for a cancer patient to keep his/her normal daily routine (job, business, work) as much as possible and do not accept "cancer" as a deadly or something very serious or horrible disease. Remember, life itself is "deadly" as we all die sooner or later. How does it matter if we die a few years early? Therefore, a cancer patient should not be scared of death at all. In general, life should never be taken seriously, no matter what we go through. Life should be enjoyed in every situation, good or bad. A little humor will also make life easier and fun. Cancer is no exception and it should be handled with some humor, understanding, and smile.

One should be careful in picking up any cancer treatment, traditional or alternative. A second opinion from another doctor or oncologist should always be taken. Some cancer patients may believe that they got cancer due to their bad karmas or some sinful deeds – that is not true. A cancer patient can easily develop low self-esteem, helplessness, and

depression if people around keep showing their sympathy, pity, and concern. Too much sympathy from others is like a sweet poison. Do not let yourself be treated like a sick or helpless person by yourself or by others. Live a normal life as if nothing has happened. This will keep your immune system strong, spirits high, and lifestyle normal. Let me repeat it again, a cancer patient should not accept any sympathy or unnecessary advice from anybody. A cancer patient should also be careful in going to psychic healers, astrologers, priests, gurus, religious rituals, and many other such alternative resources. In my view and experience, there is no need to seek help from such sources and waste money and time. The real power, intelligence, and healing is within us. It is natural that others can easily exploit a cancer patient's situation if it is shown as a weakness and helplessness.

Mind is a very powerful instrument within every person and it can be used to fight cancer. Whatever we think or believe starts happening in our body. If a cancer patient thinks and believes negatively about his/her disease, the disease will be growing even faster and the immune system will become weaker. In order to keep mind calm and creative, a cancer patient should learn and practice relaxation, self-hypnosis, meditation, and breathing (*pranayam*) techniques. These practices may even help in reducing cancer symptoms or a complete remission.

Stress and Cancer

Although there is no evidence that stress can cause cancer, however, stress plays big role in cancer growth and treatment. It has been observed clinically that emotional factors influenced the growth of cancer tumors. Nevertheless, over the past several decades, numerous clinical research studies have confirmed the important influences stressful emotions can exert with respect to the development and progression of different malignant growth. Some of the major characteristics of cancer prone people appear to be frequent feelings of hopelessness and helplessness, hatred, anger or resentment, an unusual amount of self dislike and distress, and having suffered the loss of a meaningful emotional relationship or the death of a beloved one. It has long been recognized that widowed and divorced individuals die at much higher rates for all the leading causes of death including cancer. There is little evidence that increased stresses associated with modern high tech civilization, may contribute to cancer. Such psychosocial stresses are in addition to such things as smoking, air pollution, asbestos, radiation hazards, or other carcinogenic agents causing cancer.

It is also true that firm spiritual faith, feeling of social support from family and friends, all appear to be powerful stress buffers. Such attributes are associated with a lower risk of cancer. Lack of emotional support and self-esteem as well as certain other traits can be convincingly highly predictive of cancer. It is observed that stress reduction strategies were effective in reducing malignancy by 50% in individuals assessed as being cancer prone. A clinical study demonstrated that metastatic breast cancer patients who participated in group social support activities had an 18-month increase in survival compared to controls who received only routine treatment. It has also been found that few weeks stress management course during the cancer treatment enhanced immune

system function and rate of recurrence and deaths reduced significantly. There have been numerous documented cases of spontaneous remission of cancer: some studies of such patients suggested that a firm faith and a strong positive belief system was the common denominator.

There are many reported cases of cancer cures from religious prayers, shrines, faith healers, yoga and meditations, music therapies, herbs, vitamins, acupuncture, wheat grass juice, macrobiotic diets, and other alternative treatments abound. However, one cannot fully depend on such alternative therapies for cancer cure and they can never be predicted either. Such alternative therapies can be added as supplementary to traditional medical treatment. There are hundreds of such alternatives cancer treatments and therapies available these days, but one should be careful in choosing one as they can be very expensive without any significant benefits and some of them may be even totally fake and useless. Cancer treatment, traditional or alternative, is a big business. Therefore, a cancer patient should do plenty of research before selecting an alternative therapy as a supplement for cancer cure.

There is no solid evidence that alternative therapies are more effective than conventional medical treatment. Do not believe everything they (alternative therapies) say or write about the success of their treatment. It may be true that alternative therapies have no or minimum side effects or other damages in the body. A better strategy may be to use a combination of both, that is conventional medical treatment and alternative therapy. Future medical treatments, such as targeted therapies (see later), for cancer cure are more promising. Just because someone says they know how to cure cancer does not mean they have a clue what they are doing. There are many false claims of many people and websites in alternative medicine about their cancer cure. One may find hundreds of websites on alternative cancer treatments, but not all of them are reliable. It is also true that health insurance companies may generally not pay for alternative cancer treatments.

Good health essentially depends on good communication within the internal cellular environment, as well as with the external environment, in order to preserve homeostasis or stability. That holds true for all living systems, ranging upward from the cell to an organ, person, family, corporation, state, nation, or a society. All these systems are in continuous and constant communication with each other, and problems at any level, can spread in the whole system. As we saw earlier, essentially, the basic problem with the cancer cell is that it does not communicate properly within itself and with outside environment. In fact, cancer cells can be regarded as rebellions in an orderly society of cells when they neglect their neighbors and grow autonomously over surrounding normal cells. Once such cancerous cells are created, they become even more intelligent than the normal cells in order to survive and spread to other organs as well.

Hypnosis and Cancer Healing

Hypnosis or self-hypnosis can be very effectively used for cancer patients. Going through conventional or alternative (natural, holistic type) cancer treatment can be very painful, emotional, harrowing, and exhausting experience. To the least, hypnosis can easily be

used for a cancer patient in reducing stress, anxiety, and pain, and increasing sense of well being, healing, calmness, and stronger immune system. Simple techniques of pain management in hypnosis will reduce the amount of pain medication taken by a cancer patient. For example, during my own cancer treatment or various biopsies, I never ever took a single tablet for pain or for nausea: breathing and relaxation methods helped me to reduce anxiety, pain and nausea symptoms.

Hypnotherapy is not an alternative therapy for cancer treatment, but, as supplementary, it can serve a great help to cancer patients in faster recovery, less stress, and healing from uncomfortable treatments such as radiation, chemotherapy, and surgery. In addition, the conventional cancer treatment itself can produce a range of unpleasant side effects, such as nausea, weakness, weight loss, hair loss, physical discomfort, sleeplessness, and emotional insecurity. It is also possible that conventional cancer treatments such as chemotherapy and radiation may also cause secondary cancer after the first cancer is in remission.

I would like to mention that an understanding of the cancer at the cellular level and some visualizing and/or guided imagery techniques is very helpful in fighting cancer and boosting the immune system. Such techniques may even eliminate the cancer totally for ever. The power and the intelligence of the subconscious mind are used in hypnosis to beat cancer. There have been several clinical studies on the effects of guided imagery on breast cancer and lymph cancer patients, for example, by Professor Leslie Walker of the University of Hull – Institute of Rehabilitation. Dr. Walker found a significant increase in natural killer cells and T cells in all patients using such hypnotic techniques. He also discovered that those given guided imagery under hypnosis lived on average 32 months longer than those in the control group who were not using these techniques. Another such study by Dr. David Spiegel of Stanford University reported that metastatic breast cancer patients who were in a support group that used self-hypnosis as well as other mind-body techniques lived some 18 months longer than the control group (who did not use these techniques).

In a state of mental anxiety, depression or stress for longer periods of time, the immune system becomes suppressed due to high levels of the stress hormone *cortisol*, which may also be responsible for cancer symptoms. There is medical evidence that stress suppresses cell-mediated immunity, a component of the immune system involved in tumor surveillance. The Natural Killer (NK) cell (immune system cells important for fighting cancer) activity is reduced in those who had the highest levels of overall life stress.

Simple lifestyle with minimum stress, low-fat, low-meat and low-sugar diet, more vegetables and fruits, regular exercise, avoiding tobacco, radiation, and certain chemicals, one can keep the risk of cancer very low. Hypnosis works at the subconscious level, where each individual cell is involved in the functioning of body-mind. After creating a normal trance state through relaxation, as described below, the cancer patient can feel less stress, pain, and discomfort. From this point, a guided imagery (by a therapist or through an audio device) can be introduced or the patient can do it by herself via self-hypnosis. The Brain uses imagery to communicate with the organs. Imagery is the most

fundamental language of the subconscious mind. Everything we do the subconscious mind processes it through images. Images aren't necessarily limited to visual but can be sounds, tastes, smells or a combination of several sensations. Our thoughts have a direct influence on our feelings and behavior. Our thoughts, positive or negative, make us happy or unhappy. Therefore, via meditation or self-hypnosis, a cancer patient can control over his/her thoughts, thus reducing stress and enhancing healing process.

Future of Cancer Treatments – The Targeted Therapies

The power of modern fast computers, microscopes, genetics and molecular biology has made the understanding of cancer tumors and cell circuitry more transparent and clear. The main conclusion of these studies has been that the cause of cancer is the damaged genes. Cancer related many genes are still to be identified and isolated by gene cloning. A full understanding of inside circuitry of a cell will give ultimate answer in curing cancer completely. Given enough time, cancer will strike every human body. The knowledge of genes and proteins, unique to cancer cells, will help in dealing with cancer that cannot be avoided any way.

These days targeted drugs are being developed based on the genetic information from the tumor cells. Unlike chemotherapy and radiation, targeted therapies are specifically directed at the site of cancer cells. As a result, targeted drugs generally do not produce the debilitating side effects associated with chemotherapy and radiation. Some side effects are tolerable and some may lead to acne-like skin rash, bleeding and more complications. As a result, targeted therapies have become the most active and promising areas of cancer research in oncology. Targeted cancer drugs differ radically from standard cancer treatments. Unlike chemotherapy or radiation, targeted drugs do not directly attack the cancer cells to kill them. Instead, they target the proteins and enzymes that stimulate the development and progression of cancer.

Targeted therapies are being developed for a broad range of cancers: breast, lung, liver, kidney, pancreatic, colorectal, as well as for leukemia, lymphoma, and multiple myeloma. It will be possible soon that the targeted drugs are customized as per the individual's cancer. A cancer patient should explore the targeted therapies and look for the trials being conducted by various hospitals and institutes throughout the world, particularly in the United States.

Soon, through the human genome project, it will be possible to catalog the entire gene library carried in human cells, including the exact number of genes. The base sequence of these genes will provide the hints as to the life of the cell. Once the human genome is known in precise intimate details, the catalog of tumor suppressor genes will help to understand all types of cancers and cure them without any suffering. The future of cancer research seems to be very promising. A cancer patient should keep updated with latest researches and advances in cancer treatment. Such information about latest cancer drugs may not come from the patient's doctor or oncologist. A cancer patient should not hundred percent depend on the his/her doctor's advice and treatment, rather he/she should do his/her own research and take second opinion.

