



## Common Cancer Myths

Increasingly for many people, the internet has become the first place to go when looking for information. You can get instant access to almost any topic. People facing cancer often use this information to make decisions about their illness and treatment. You can get vast amounts of information on research studies, doctors, hospitals, cancer treatment guidelines, drugs, complementary and alternative treatments. Unfortunately, a lot of what passes for cancer information is made up of opinion, salesmanship and testimonials and is not grounded in careful science. The wrong information can hurt you when it comes to cancer.

**Always remember that the information found online should not take the place of medical advice.** If you have a health-related problem, please talk to a doctor. There's no other way to get the same experience and care as sitting down with your health care provider who can look at your health history, your unique medical situation, examine you and talk with you about how you feel and what your goals or needs are.

More often than not, there is not one right answer. We have compiled some myths commonly encountered in our practice. We hope this helps you navigate some of this information, and in other cases, misinformation.

**Myth:** Cancer is always fatal

**Reality:** Research is ongoing and with all the recent progress in cancer research, it has become possible for an increasing number of patients to achieve cure.

**Myth:** Cancer is always painful

**Reality:** Some cancers never cause pain.

**Myth:** Everyone who has the same type of cancer gets the same kind of treatment.

**Reality:** This is one of the biggest misconceptions. Different drugs are used for different cancer types. Some drugs have different targets, even within the same type of cancer. Chemotherapy is not one drug; it is an umbrella term commonly used to refer to drugs used to kill cancer cells. There are many different types. There are many factors that are considered when choosing the appropriate treatment regimen and the path is becoming more and more individualized as research continues.

**Myth:** Sugar feeds cancer

**Reality:** Sugar does not feed cancer. Sugar can contribute to obesity which could, in this way, increase your risk of developing cancer. Naturally occurring sugars like those found in fruits, vegetables and whole grains are all needed to help maintain muscle and weight during cancer treatment which has been shown to help fight cancer.

**Myth:** There are herbal products that can cure cancer

**Reality:** Some studies suggest that some alternative or complimentary therapies, including some herbs, can help patients manage side effects of cancer treatment. No herbal products have been shown to be effective for treating cancer. Some herbal products may, in fact, be harmful when taken during chemotherapy or with radiation.

**Myth:** All cancer is hereditary

**Reality:** Only about 5-10% of cancers are caused by mutations that are inherited from parents. The remaining 90-95% of cancers are caused by mutations that occur during the person's lifetime as a result of aging and exposure to environmental factors such as tobacco smoke, radiation, obesity, etc.

**Myth:** A positive attitude helps beat cancer.

**Reality:** There is no scientific proof that a positive attitude affects your cancer or chance of being cured. It can improve your quality of life which may help you maintain a more active lifestyle, maintain ties to friends/family and continue social activities. This would consequently improve your sense of well-being which may help you deal with your cancer.

**Myth:** Biopsies and/or Surgery cause cancer to spread.

**Reality:** For most types of cancer, there is no conclusive evidence that a needle biopsy causes cancer to spread. There are a few exceptions such as testicular cancer. Doctors/Surgeons are aware of these exceptions and avoid biopsy, when possible, in this situation. For most people, avoiding the biopsy or surgery can lead to late detection and poor prognosis which means higher chance of dying from the cancer

**Myth:** Nausea, sickness and pain are always part of cancer treatment.

**Reality:** There have been significant advancements in medications to manage the symptoms of cancer treatment as well as more awareness of pain and pain management. While each individual responds differently, it is possible to prevent or control side effects such as these thus maintaining the desired quality of life.

**Myth:** Drug companies and the FDA are blocking or withholding new cancer treatments.

**Reality:** Doctors are as interested in finding a cure as anyone else, often for the same reason – it affects them personally. They hate to see a loved one in pain and don't want to lose that person. They want to spare others what they have gone through. The FDA must approve new drugs before they can be given to people who aren't enrolled in clinical trials. Scientific studies take time to determine the safety and effectiveness of new cancer treatments. This can give the appearance that effective new treatments are being blocked. The doctors and yes, the FDA, are your allies they make your safety the highest priority.