

# Fit for life

How can we best reduce our risk of cancer?

**Wendy Pryer** talks to some local experts.

**S**ir Charles Gairdner Hospital has a centre dedicated to helping care for cancer patients.

Called the SolarisCare Cancer Support Centre, it is headed by specialist haematologist David Joske, a man who has closely reviewed most of the research on cancer, its prevention and efficacy of treatments.

"The question of prevention is a big issue and there seems to be no doubt that if we change our lifestyles, we can reduce the risk of getting cancer," he said.

Some cancers are preventable.

Most skin cancers are caused by sun damage and many cases of oral cancer are tobacco and alcohol-related.

However, he points out that with many cancers, such as leukaemia and bone cancer, the cause is not known and we do not know how they can be prevented. Genetics also play a big part in the development of the disease.

Dr Joske says the vast amount of research undertaken into dietary changes and cancer prevention shows disappointing results.

Every other day, it seems, new research is released showing the latest wonder food that contains anti-cancer properties.

These foods, generally fruit and vegetables, are rich in antioxidants, which scavenge for molecules known as free radicals.

Free radicals are dangerous substances that can impair the proper functioning of the immune system.

But Dr Joske says few of the promising laboratory results have been replicated in human trials.

However, he does recommend patients undergoing cancer

the immune system, he says there is little evidence from clinical trials that it directly leads to cancer.

But for people diagnosed with cancer and undergoing treatment, reducing stress is important to give the immune system the best chance of fighting the disease.

This is where the SolarisCare Cancer Support Centre, which offers a range of complementary therapies to cancer patients in WA, plays an important role.

Therapies offered such as hypnotherapy, acupuncture, massage and Bowen therapy, as well as the emotional support for patients and

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treatment drink lots of green tea, a beverage renowned for its high antioxidant content, and red wine in moderation.

While Dr Joske has his doubts about whether a diet rich in antioxidants prevents cancer, he says some cancers are linked to poor diet.

"About 20 per cent of colon cancers could be prevented by dietary changes," he says.

Dr Joske says there is strong clinical evidence that exercise is important in the prevention of cancer.

A 1995 California study of 24,000 teachers revealed rigorous exercise can reduce the risk of developing breast cancer.

While stress can play havoc with

their carers appear to have a positive effect on a patient's ability to fight disease and prevent a relapse.

Ivy Bullen, a GP who runs Balya Cancer Self Help and Wellness, which conducts retreats for cancer patients in Gidgegannup, as well as optimum health retreats for the public, says nutrition is important in preventing disease, including cancer.

"There is much laboratory and epidemiological data which strongly links diet to cancer but I believe one doesn't need a university degree to understand the basics 'we are what we eat'," Dr Bullen says.

She recommends 10 vegetables and up to three pieces of fruit each day. Dr Bullen also believes stress is a trigger for cancer.