



AWARENESS

ODD THINGS THAT MAY CAUSE CANCER

World Cancer Day is commemorated on 4 February every year. Cancer is the second largest killer in the world, according to the World Health Organization.

The key word in cancer-causing agents is 'carcinogens'. The National Cancer Institute in the UK defines carcinogenic agents as those foods, beverages, or substances that cause cancer. The American Cancer Society, with the help of the International Agency for Research on Cancer and the United States National Toxicology Program, created an extensive list of all known carcinogens to date.

What follows is an abbreviated version of this list, to highlight the oddest ones. Please read these with caution – carcinogens do not necessarily lead to cancer all the time or under all circumstances.

Coal-tar: The thick black liquid contains many chemicals, but particularly benzene (a known carcinogen).

Diesel exhaust fumes: There are about 30 components to diesel oil that are listed as carcinogenic at various levels. Interestingly, petrol exhaust fumes are not on the list.

Plants that contain aristolochic acid: These plants are typically used in Chinese herbal medicine. This acid is known to increase the risk of developing kidney disease and urothelial cancer.

Wood dust: Carpenters and furniture makers that chronically inhale wood dust have a much higher risk of developing nasal cancer.

Paint exposure: Again, benzene raises its ugly head. This compound is found in paint and people with excessive exposure to it, like painters, have an increased risk of developing bladder or lung cancers, as well as leukaemia.

Rubber manufacturing: Although rubber is harvested from a humble tree, the manufacturing process is known to cause an increased risk of cancer in those workers involved.

Naturally occurring aflatoxins: These toxins are produced by certain fungi and are some of the most carcinogenic substances known to man. They specifically lead to an increased risk of liver cancer.

Sunbeds: Don't think a sunbed is a safe replacement for the sun. It produces ultra-violet rays that can cause skin cancer, just like its natural equivalent. Unfortunately, many people don't practice the right safety precautions when using a sunbed.

Processed meats: Smoked and preserved cold meats, bacon, ham, and sausages are all considered carcinogenic, according to the World Health Organization.

It helps to remember more commonly known cancer-causing behaviours too, including obesity, smoking, drinking alcohol, lack of exercise and eating processed and sugary foods excessively. Eliminating or minimising these behaviours will also help to prevent the risk of cancer.