

Prevention Is More Essential Than Ever in the Fight Against Cancer

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"An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure," is as true today as it was when we heard our grandparents say it. In 2015, Americans should know that what we eat, drink and how much we exercise have a profound effect on our health and well-being. Exposure to harmful, cancer-causing chemicals in our personal care products, cosmetics, cleaning agents and foods is raising our risk for cancer. And our children are most vulnerable to the effects of diet, exercise, and environmental toxins, and will predict their future health outcomes.

As a physician, I recognize that we all have an opportunity to enhance our health, and reduce our cancer risk. That is why I became involved with Less Cancer, a not-for-profit organization founded by Bill Couzens that is dedicated to the reduction of cancer risk.

As author of *A World Without Cancer*, and a board member of Less Cancer, I understand that the special event we've planned for February 4th, National Cancer Prevention Day, is necessary to raise awareness and motivate people in all walks of life to do more to prevent cancer. Less Cancer's event on Capitol Hill will welcome public health and public policy leaders, university students, cancer prevention advocates, legislators and more. I am honored to serve as moderator for the panel discussion, and look forward to a lively exchange of information and insights.

There is so much we can do right now to reduce our cancer risk. Over 50 percent of all cancer is preventable by applying what we know right now. Attention to diet, exercise, avoiding or at least limiting alcohol, ending smoking, protecting our skin from the sun and avoiding stress are important to live healthier lives, with [lower cancer risk](#).

Our children are our future. A critical time of growth and development occurs from childhood to adolescence, when we can improve our children's health, and reduce their cancer risk. Nutritious meals, including lunch in school, and daily physical exercise, are essential for children and adolescents.

Education in our schools about a healthful diet, reinforced by school lunches rich in vegetables, whole grains and fruits, help children live healthier, stronger lives. Daily physical education in school, together with neighborhood playgrounds and sidewalks, encourage physical activity.

And eliminating harmful chemicals from household cleaners, cosmetics and personal care products, such as shampoo, body wash and toothpaste, and cosmetics, is an important element in cancer prevention. The endocrine - disrupting chemicals, such as BPA, parabens and phthalates, should be banned. The World Health Organization, the American Association of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, and the American Reproductive Society, have already [called for a change](#) in government policy to identify and [reduce exposure](#) to these toxic environmental agents.

Our fruits, vegetables, poultry, meat, and fish should be free of toxic pesticides, herbicides and preservatives.

New legislation is needed to regulate harmful chemicals in the United States -- and we should all advocate for a change in policy so that children and adults are protected from the harmful chemicals in our daily lives. The time has come for meaningful reform of TSCA -- the [Toxic Substances Control Act](#), originally established in 1976. Under TSCA, the Environmental Protection Agency has the authority to require reporting, testing and to set restrictions of chemicals. However, food, drugs, cosmetics, pesticides and other substances are excluded from regulation under TSCA. In fact, it has been [called a "toothless" law](#) that is inadequate to protect consumers.

If consumers are to be protected, state governments will have to take the lead. California has done just that in

enacting the Safer Consumer Products Law to regulate toxins in household products, food, drugs, pesticides, dental filings, pharmaceutical packaging and medical devices. The state asked manufacturers to replace harmful chemicals with safe substitutes. If companies fail to comply, their products cannot be sold in California, the nation's largest consumer market. Hopefully, the success of this groundbreaking law will encourage other states to do the same to [protect consumers](#).

An improvement in the health of Americans will require meaningful change in our state and federal laws as well as our lifestyles.

The [President's Cancer Panel](#) emphasized the need for change in its 2008-2009 report, "Reducing Environmental Cancer," when it boldly addressed the President of the United States, directly: "The Panel urges you most strongly to use the power of your office to remove the carcinogens and other toxins from our food, water, and air that needlessly increase health care costs, cripple our Nation's productivity, and devastate American lives."

A collaborative effort is needed to prevent cancer, and that goal is within our reach. As a physician and a mother, and board member of Less Cancer, I strive to motivate all segments of society. Whether we are adults or children, members of the media or medical community, government, industry, education or advocacy group, we can all contribute to a healthier environment, a stronger, more vibrant society, and ultimately, to a world without cancer. Prevention of cancer and other diseases should be a state and national priority in 2015.

For more information about *National Cancer Prevention Day*, February 4th, sponsored by Less Cancer, please visit LessCancer.org.

This blog post is part of a series produced by The Huffington Post and LessCancer.org in recognition of World Cancer Day and National Cancer Prevention Day (both Feb. 4), and in conjunction with Less Cancer's program on Cancer Prevention in Washington, D.C. on 2/4/14. To see all the other posts in the series, click [here](#). For more information about Lesscancer.org click [here](#).

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