

# Cancer risk due to smoking, unhealthy diet, lack of physical activity, and infections is preventable

1 October 2018



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Almost four in every 10 new cases of cancer in Germany are attributable to lifestyle and environmental factors. These include primarily smoking, low physical activity, overweight, and infections. Hermann Brenner and his group of authors from the German Cancer Research Center (DKFZ) report on how these risk factors affect the number of cancer cases in Germany in concrete terms, in this themed issue of *Deutsches Ärzteblatt International*.

In their series of articles, the Heidelberg-based authors determined the proportion of new cancer cases in a particular segment of the population among all new cancers expected for 2018. The calculation is based on population projections, published relative risks, and cancer incidence and exposure data for 35-84 year olds in Germany.

In the current year, an estimated 85,072 cases of cancer will have been caused by smoking. This corresponds to 19 percent of all new cases. In men, the proportion of lung cancers due to tobacco

consumption is 89 percent and in women, 83 percent. Overweight and a lack of physical activity/exercise account for 7 percent and 6 percent of the expected cancer burden, respectively, and constitute the main risk for uterine and renal cancers. In overweight persons, the [risk](#) of liver cancer is also raised, while a lack of [physical exercise](#) also contributes to lung cancer. Bacterial or viral infections cause 17 600 incident cases, which is 4 percent of expected new [cancer](#) cases. Infection with *Helicobacter pylori* and human papillomaviruses have a major role in this setting. A lower but still important proportion of new malignancies is due to high alcohol consumption, high intake of processed meat, or low intakes of dietary fiber, fruits, and vegetables. Additional [risk factors](#) include indoor radon, particulate matter, or sunbed use.

The authors make a plea for more stringent prevention measures in terms of tobacco and alcohol consumption, overweight, unhealthy diet, and lacking physical exercise. They also call for targeted preventive measures regarding infections and [environmental factors](#). But they highlight that further research is needed in order to identify and quantify environmental risks more comprehensively.

**More information:** Ute Mons et al. Cancers due to smoking and high alcohol consumption, *Deutsches Ärzteblatt Online* (2018). [DOI: 10.3238/arztebl.2018.0571](https://doi.org/10.3238/arztebl.2018.0571)

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Thomas Gredner et al. Cancers due to infection and selected environmental factors, *Deutsches Ärzteblatt Online* (2018). [DOI:](https://doi.org/10.3238/arztebl.2018.0578)

[10.3238/arztebl.2018.0586](https://www.arztebl.de/10.3238/arztebl.2018.0586)

Provided by Deutsches Aerzteblatt International

APA citation: Cancer risk due to smoking, unhealthy diet, lack of physical activity, and infections is preventable (2018, October 1) retrieved 10 August 2022 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2018-10-cancer-due-unhealthy-diet-lack.html>

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