WWW.IJRPR.COM

International Journal of Research Publication and Reviews

Journal homepage: www.ijrpr.com ISSN 2582-7421

Understanding Cancer: Causes, Diagnosis, and Treatment Strategies

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ABSTRACT::

Cancer is a group of diseases characterized by the uncontrolled growth and spread of abnormal cells. If not detected and treated early, it can lead to death. The disease can arise in almost any tissue of the body and affects people worldwide. This article explores the biology of cancer, its causes, methods of diagnosis, treatment options, and recent advancements in cancer research.

Keywords: Cancer, Tumor, Carcinogenesis, Chemotherapy, Radiation therapy, Immunotherapy, Metastasis, Oncology, Biomarkers, Early detection.

1. Introduction::

Cancer remains a major public health concern and is the second leading cause of death globally. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), nearly 10 million people died from cancer in 2020, accounting for nearly one in six deaths worldwide [1]. It is not a single disease but a collection of related diseases where cells divide uncontrollably and may invade surrounding tissues or spread to other parts of the body.

2. Causes and Risk Factors

Cancer can be caused by both external factors (such as tobacco, infectious organisms, radiation) and internal factors (such as inherited mutations, hormones, immune conditions). These causes may act together or in sequence to initiate carcinogenesis [2].

Major risk factors include:

Tobacco use [3]

Alcohol consumption [4]

Poor diet and obesity [5]

Exposure to carcinogens [6]

Genetic predisposition [7]

Viral infections (e.g., HPV, Hepatitis B and C) [8]

3. Types of Cancer

Some of the most common types of cancer include:

Lung cancer [9]

Breast cancer [10]

Colorectal cancer [11]

Prostate cancer [12]

Skin cancer (melanoma) [13]

Leukemia and lymphomas [14]

4. Diagnosis and Screening

Early diagnosis significantly improves cancer outcomes. Common diagnostic tools include:

Biopsy

Imaging techniques (X-ray, CT, MRI, PET) [15]

Blood tests for tumor markers [16]

Genetic testing [17]

Screening programs for cancers such as breast, cervical, and colorectal cancers have been shown to reduce mortality by enabling earlier detection [18].

5. Treatment Strategies

Treatment depends on the type and stage of cancer. The main treatment modalities include:

Surgery: Removal of tumor tissue [19]

Radiation therapy: Use of high-energy rays to kill cancer cells [20]

Chemotherapy: Drugs that kill or stop the growth of cancer cells [21]

Immunotherapy: Boosts the body's natural defenses to fight cancer [22]

Targeted therapy: Drugs that specifically target cancerous cells [23]

6. Recent Advances

Recent developments have greatly enhanced cancer management:

CAR-T cell therapy for blood cancers [24]

Liquid biopsies for non-invasive early detection [25]

AI-assisted diagnostics for imaging [26]

Nanotechnology-based drug delivery systems [27]

7. Prevention and Lifestyle

Nearly 30-50% of cancers can be prevented by avoiding risk factors and implementing evidence-based prevention strategies [28]. These include quitting smoking, healthy eating, physical activity, and vaccination against cancer-causing infections (e.g., HPV, HBV).

8. Conclusion::

Cancer remains one of the most complex and challenging diseases. However, advancements in diagnosis and treatment are improving survival rates and quality of life for patients. Public awareness, early detection, and research are critical to combating this global threat.

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