

Introduction

Cancer lies dormant in all of us. Like all living organisms, our bodies are making defective cells all the time. That's how tumors are born. But our bodies are also equipped with a number of mechanisms that detect and keep such cells in check. In the West, one person in four will die of cancer, but three in four will not. Their defense mechanisms will hold out, and they will die of other causes.

I have cancer. I was diagnosed for the first time fifteen years ago. I received conventional treatment and the cancer went into remission, but I relapsed after that. Then I decided to learn everything I could to help my body defend itself against the illness. As a physician, established researcher, and former director of the Center for Integrative Medicine at the University of Pittsburgh, I had access to invaluable information about natural approaches to prevent or help treat cancer. I've kept cancer at bay for seven years now. In this book, I'd like to tell you the stories—scientific and personal—behind what I learned.

After surgery and chemotherapy for cancer, I asked my oncologist for advice. What should I do to lead a healthy life and what precautions could I take to avoid a relapse? “There is nothing special to do. Lead your life normally. We'll do MRI scans at regular intervals and if your tumor comes back, we'll detect it early,” replied this leading light of modern medicine.

“But aren't there exercises I could do, a diet to follow or to avoid? Shouldn't I be working on my mental outlook?” I asked. My colleague's answer bewildered me: “In this domain, do what you like. It can't do you any harm. But we don't have any scientific evidence that any of these approaches can prevent a relapse.”

In reality, what my doctor meant was the oncology is an extraordinarily complex field that is changing at breakneck speed. He was already hard pressed to keep up with the most recent diagnostic and therapeutic procedures. We had used all the drugs and all recognized medical practices relevant to my case. In our present state of knowledge, we had reached limits. As for more theoretical mind-body or nutritional approaches, he clearly lacked the time or interest to explore these avenues.

I know this problem as an academic physician myself. Each in our own specialty, we are rarely aware of fundamental discoveries recently published in prestigious journals such as *Science* or *Nature*. Not until they have been the subject of large-scale human studies do we take note. Still, these major breakthroughs may sometimes enable us to protect ourselves long before they have led to new drugs or protocols that will become the mainstream treatments of tomorrow.

It took me months of research to begin to understand how I could help my body protect itself from cancer. I participated in conferences in the United States and in Europe that brought together researchers who were exploring this type of medicine, which works with the “terrain” at the same time that it addresses the disease. I scoured medical databases and combed scientific publications. I soon perceived that the available information was often incomplete and widely dispersed. It only took on its full meaning when it was brought together and combined.

Taken as a whole, the mass of scientific data reveals an essential role for our natural defenses in the battle against cancer. Thanks to key encounters with other

physicians and practitioners who were already working in this field, I managed to put all this information into practice along with my treatment.

This is what I learned: If we all have a potential cancer lying dormant in us, each of us also has a body designed to fight the process of tumor development. It is up to each of us to use of body's natural defenses. Other cultures do this much better than ours.

The cancers that afflict the West—for example, breast, colon and prostate cancer—are seven to sixty times more frequent here than in Asia. Nevertheless, statistics reveal that relative to men in the West, just as many precancerous microtumors are found in the prostates of Asian men who die before fifty from causes other than cancer. Something in *their* way of life prevents these microtumors from developing. On the other hand, the cancer rate among Japanese people who have settled in the West catches up with ours in one or two generations. Something about *our* way of life weakens our defenses against this disease.

We all live with myths that undermine our capacity to fight cancer. For example, many of us are convinced that cancer is primarily linked to our genetic makeup, rather than our lifestyle. When we look at the research, however, we can see that the contrary is true.

If cancer was transmitted essentially through genes, the cancer rate among adopted children would be the same as that among their biological—not their adoptive—parents. In Denmark, where a detailed genetic register traces each individual's origins, researchers have found the biological parents of more than a thousand children adopted at birth. The researchers' conclusion, published in the prestigious *New England Journal of Medicine*, forces us to changes all our assumptions about cancer. They found that the genes of biological parents who died of cancer before fifty had *no influence* on an adoptee's risk of developing cancer. On the other hand, death from cancer before the age of fifty of an adoptive parent (who passes on habits but not genes) increased the rate of mortality from cancer fivefold among the adoptees. This study shows that lifestyle is fundamentally involved in vulnerability to cancer. All research on cancer concurs: Genetic factors contribute to at most 15 percent of mortalities from cancer. In short, there is no genetic fatality. We can all learn to protect ourselves.

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