

natureOUTLOOK

CANCER PREVENTION

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Ask many people what they are afraid of, and cancer — the big C — will often top the list. Some forms of cancer have become easily treatable. But in many cases, by the time doctors deploy the weapons of surgery, chemotherapy or radiation, the cancer has already progressed past the point where medical intervention can cure the condition.

Many cancer specialists now contend that the best way to deal with cancer is to ensure it doesn't develop in the first place. Just as the most effective way to deal with frostbite is not to amputate a toe but to wear warm socks and shoes beforehand, the same is true for cancer — the best solution is to enhance our defences and, as best we can, avoid carcinogens.

A small subset of the cancer research community is focusing its attention on this goal. Chemopreventive drugs and vaccines could fortify our healthy bodies against future malignancies (see articles on page S5 and S8). New technologies are revealing precancerous lesions when they can be easily snuffed out (S14). Certain foods with anticancer properties can form part of a healthy diet (S22), while their prophylactic ingredients can be extracted or synthesized.

While curing a patient is a heart-warming triumph; prevention merely maintains the status quo of good health. No surprise which activity gets the lion's share of media attention — and funding. This *Nature Outlook* showcases the progress being made in cancer prevention despite its status as the poor relation of the cancer research world.

We can only hope that the efforts reported here will make cancer as obsolete as the pock marks that not so long ago marred the faces of those who survived smallpox. We are pleased to acknowledge the financial support of the Janssen Pharmaceutical Companies in producing this *Outlook*. As always, *Nature* retains sole responsibility for all editorial content.

Herb Brody

Supplements Editor, Nature Outlook.

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