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ICA: Take care of your body and cut cancer rate in half

• By JUDY SIEGEL

While one in three Israelis will contract some kind of cancer during their lifetimes, half of all malignancies can be prevented by changing habits and lifestyles, according to the Israel Cancer Association.

On Tuesday, the ICA held – with Health Ministry officials – a seminar and press conference to mark World Cancer Day, which will be held globally on Friday.

High death rates from cancer are not inevitable, ministry director-general Dr. Ronni Gamzu said. During the coming months, his office would initiate legislation to encourage cancer prevention, he said.

Every year, 28,000 Israelis are diagnosed with a tumor and 11,000 die of cancer.

But lowering the smoking rate further, discouraging alcohol consumption and exposure to the sun's harmful rays and encouraging people to eat healthful foods, lose weight and pursue regular exercise can have a major impact in reducing the cancer rate, which is the leading cause of death in Israel, said ICA director-general Miri Ziv.

The ICA is Israel's representation in the Union for International Cancer Control (UICC), which is coordinating the Friday events and which notes that 12 million people around the world die of cancer each year. The UICC predicts that if nothing is done, the death rate from cancer will rise by 80 percent in the coming decades.

UICC president Dr. Eduardo

Cazap said that he has met many cancer patients who conceded that they regretted having neglected their bodies by smoking and adopting other bad habits that caused their disease. "In their name, I call on everyone to take simple actions to reduce their personal risk for cancer and to tell all their loved ones," he said.

Research has shown that drinking an excess of alcohol (more than one little glass) increases the risk of breast, throat, esophageal, colorectal and throat cancer. Alcohol also is responsible for some other cancers. Surveys have shown that 21% of Israelis over the age of 18 drank five servings of alcoholic beverages within five hours (at bars and other places) at least once a month.

A recent study published in the *BMJ* (British Medical Journal) showed that eating a healthful diet – including five servings of vegetables and fruits a day – could save 33,000 Britons a year from chronic diseases including cancer.

About 15% of Israelis are obese – with a body-mass index of over 30. Already between the ages of 12 and 18, 7% of Jewish teenage boys, 3.6% of Jewish girls, 9.3% of Arab boys and 5.2% of Arab girls are obese.

As for physical exertion, only a quarter of Jewish youths aged 11 to 15 exercise at least four times for a total of 2.5 hours a week; Arab youths are even less likely to exercise. More than half of youths in this age group watch more than three hours of TV per day. All ages – including the elderly – will benefit from regular exercise, said the ICA.

Regarding tobacco, which



RONNI GAMZU

causes the vast majority of lung tumors as well as some other cancers, 12.5% of Israeli teens smoke cigarettes or nargila water pipes; 34% of male draftees and 26.5% of female draftees smoke, but when they are discharged, the rate rises to 41% and 34% respectively.

The ICA has joined the UICC's global effort to sign a petition to struggle against cancer. The text, which can be viewed and the petition signed via its website at www.cancer.org.il, requires giving one's name in English, e-mail address and city of residence. Those who sign call for reducing the use of tobacco, hepatitis B (to minimize liver cancer) and human papilloma virus (that causes cervical cancer) through vaccines, increasing education about cancer, boosting palliative care to reduce pain in patients and improving treatment. The petition and list of signatories will be presented to a UN conference on cancer to be held in September.

Meanwhile, reacting to the findings reported at the conference, MK Dov Henin of the Knesset Environmental Quality Committee said he would convene a special session to discuss them.