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Israel's cancer survival rate 6th highest among 85 countries

Israel Cancer Association's Knock on the Door fund-raising campaign on Sunday, October 26

• By JUDY SIEGEL

Cancer survival in Israel is the sixth highest among 85 countries around the world, according to the nonprofit Israel Cancer Association, which is holding its annual Knock on the Door fund-raising campaign this coming Sunday.

Philanthropist Yehudit Yovel Recanati, whose mother Mathilda died of colon cancer at 59 and whose husband, Israel Yovel, died of leukemia, will chair the campaign to raise money for the ICA, which gets no governmental support.

The money is used for research, education, treatment, patient assistance and prevention of cancer by the ICA, which has 70 branches around the country. Schoolchildren will knock on doors of homes on Sunday and ask for contributions.

According to the Health Ministry's National Cancer Registry, the prevalence of invasive cancer is lower in the Jerusalem, Sharon, Ramle, Beersheba, Safed, Rehovot, Petah Tikva and Judea and Samaria districts than in the Haifa, Acre, Tel Aviv, Hadera and Ashkelon districts, according to the deputy head of the registry, Dr. Lital Keinan-Boker.

But this cannot be attributed to specific factors in each area, she said, adding that more research must be done on demography, occupation-

al exposure to carcinogens, smoking and obesity levels and other factors.

ICA chairman and senior oncologist Prof. Eliezer Robinson noted at a briefing on Monday in Tel Aviv that only Australia, Luxemburg, the US, New Zealand and Ireland had better survival rates than Israel, and trailing behind were developed nations like Finland, German, Norway, the United Kingdom and Austria.

Robinson also quoted US research showing that survival rates after cancer are lower in the obese (with a body-mass index of 30 or more). The main reason is that anti-cancer drugs spread through the body with more difficulty than in those of normal weight. Complications are more frequent, surgical wounds heal more slowly, and infections are more common in the obese. The risk of contracting cancer, including breast and prostate tumors, is also higher in the very overweight. There is also a connection between death from colon cancer among the obese.

Therefore, oncologists advise their patients at diagnosis to lose weight, exercise and change their lifestyles to improve their chances for survival.

The ministry has warned against using chemical hair-straightening masks containing carcinogenic chemicals, as studies show they pose danger both to users and hair-



SCHOOLCHILDREN WILL knock on doors of homes on Sunday and ask for contributions to the Israel Cancer Association. (Courtesy)

dressers in constant contact with these liquids. Written warnings on the subject have been disseminated among hairdressers and customers who use the products. Vapors from the liquids enter the body. Only products that the ministry approved should be used. (More information can be obtained on the ministry website at www.health.gov.il.)

Major new studies in Atlanta, Georgia, have found a link between higher consumption of calcium, vitamin D and dairy products with a lower rate of colon cancer and survival if one contracts the cancer.

Researchers in Florida found that higher consumption of alcohol by men is linked to the presence of human papilloma virus in the men. HPV is transmitted to women in sexual relations and significantly raises their risk of cervical cancer, as well as penile and rectal cancer in men. Both men and women are now advised to limit their drinking of alcohol to one unit a day, rather than two units in men and one in women.

Children who contract cancer are 70 percent more likely than healthy children to

contract at least one chronic disease as adults, according to new research. The diseases include metabolic syndrome likely to lead to diabetes and cardiovascular disease. Thus people who had cancer as youngsters should be advised to improve their lifestyles, exercise and eat right.

Eating a lot of red meat when young can increase the risk of breast cancer in middle-aged women by 22%, according to a major study of thousands of nurses. Eating chicken, instead, reduced the risk of breast cancer in women, according to the study. Just replacing one daily meal of red meat with meals of legumes, nuts, chicken and fish lowered the breast cancer danger by 14%.

In addition, a sedentary lifestyle resulting from excessive (more than seven hours a day) TV watching also increases the risk of various types of cancer, according to a German study.

Research by Prof. Sigal Sidetzky of the Gertner Institute at Sheba Medical Center has led to advice for breast cancer survivors to go to doctors on a regular basis for follow-up and adopt a healthy lifestyle to improve cure and survival rates.