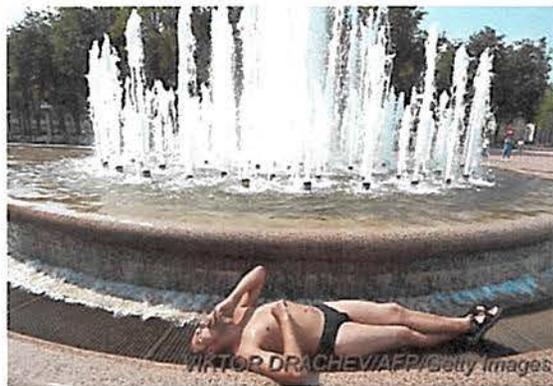


# Your lifestyle is to blame for 70 - 90% of cancers

By [Catey Hill](#)

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For the most part, 'bad luck' isn't responsible for cancer



Do most people who get cancer simply have bad luck? Or is cancer something they might be able to prevent? A new study suggests the latter.

The study, published in [Nature](#), revealed that it is mostly environmental and external factors like smoking, drinking, diet, getting too much sun and exposure to toxic chemicals that cause cancer, rather than intrinsic factors like random cell mutations.

Intrinsic factors accounted for just 10 - 30% of people's lifetime risk of getting cancer, while extrinsic risks accounted for 70 - 90% for most common cancer types, the study showed. "Cancer risk is heavily influenced by extrinsic factors," the study researchers, who work at Stony Brook University in New York, concluded.

That's good news for many, as it means that cancer might be more avoidable (through changes in our lifestyles) than we previously thought. "Environmental factors play an important role in cancer incidence and they are modifiable through lifestyle changes and/or vaccinations," the researchers write.

Many experts cheered this finding. "There's no question what's at stake here," [John Potter, a doctor who studies cancer at the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center, told Nature magazine](#). "This informs whether or not we expend energy on prevention."

The study's conclusions do fly in the face of some other cancer research. A report in the journal *Science* published earlier this year concluded just the opposite: that roughly two thirds of cancers were caused by intrinsic factors (these findings came to be known as the "bad luck" hypothesis).

Cancer Types	Extrinsic risk	Examples of potential extrinsic risk factors*
Breast	substantial	Oral contraceptive, hormone replacement therapy, lifestyle (diet, smoking, alcohol, weight)
Prostate	substantial	Diet, obesity, smoking
Lung	>90%	Smoking, air pollutant
Colorectal	>75%	Diet, smoking, alcohol, obesity
Melanoma	65-80%	Sun exposure
Basal cell	~90%	UV
Hepatocellular	~80%	HBV, HCV
Gastric	65-80%	H. pylori
Cervical	~90%	HPV
Head & Neck	~75%	Tobacco, alcohol
Esophageal	>75%	Smoking, alcohol, obesity, diet
Oropharyngeal	~70%	HPV
Thyroid	>72%	Diet low in iodine, radiation
Kidney	>58%	Smoking, obesity, workplace exposures
Thyroid	>77%	Largely unclear
Small intestine	>61%	Diet, smoking, alcohol
Extranodal non-Hodgkin's lymphoma (NIH)	>71%	Chemicals, radiation, immune system deficiency
Testis	>45%	Largely unclear
Anal and anorectal cancers	>63%	HPV, smoking

Source: [Nature](#)

But the Stony Brook University researchers concluded that the incidence of cancer is too high for that to be true. "The rates of mutation accumulation by intrinsic processes are not sufficient to account for the observed cancer risks," they write in the study published in *Nature*.

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