

# What is cancer?

## How does cancer start?

Cancer is a disease that has to do with the body's cells. The body is made up of billions of cells. Normal cells grow and divide (split into two). When cells die, they are replaced by new cells.

Sometimes, cells do not work properly and they don't die. When this happens, the cells divide out of control and may grow into a lump (tumour) called cancer. There are more than 100 different types of cancer.

## How did I get cancer?

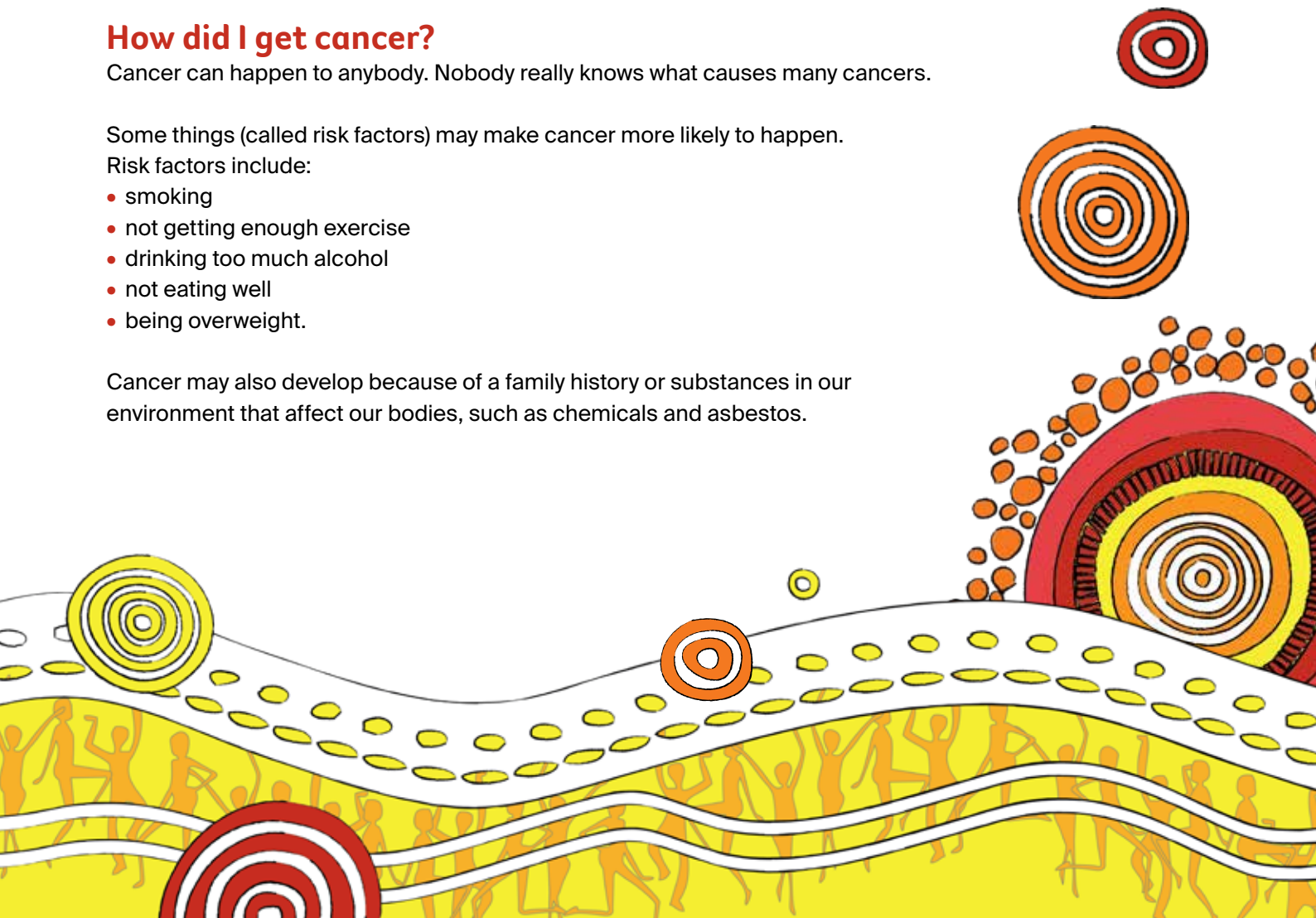
Cancer can happen to anybody. Nobody really knows what causes many cancers.

Some things (called risk factors) may make cancer more likely to happen.

Risk factors include:

- smoking
- not getting enough exercise
- drinking too much alcohol
- not eating well
- being overweight.

Cancer may also develop because of a family history or substances in our environment that affect our bodies, such as chemicals and asbestos.





## How can I find out if I have cancer?

Different tests help the doctor find out if you have cancer and what type it is.

You may have tests using machines that look inside the body (scans), or blood tests. Sometimes, the doctor removes some cells from the tumour to see if they are healthy or not. This is called a biopsy.

These tests will also help the doctor to work out what treatment you need.


## What happens if I have cancer?

Cancer is treated in different ways, including:

- surgery to cut out the cancer
- strong medicines such as chemotherapy
- special x-rays called radiation therapy.

## Cancer facts

- Cancer doesn't always cause death.
- Cancer is not a punishment for something you did wrong.
- You can't catch cancer from someone who has cancer.
- Treatment doesn't always make you feel sick.
- Not everyone loses their hair.
- Treatment can help cancer to go away.
- You can usually have visitors in hospital.



Cancer won't go away without treatment.

## More information

- **Cancer Council**  
13 11 20  
cancercouncil.com.au
- **Your local Aboriginal Health Service**

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The design features elements from the artwork *Healing Journey* by Carissa Paglino. Carissa was born and raised in Newcastle (Awabakal country) and is a descendant of the Wanaruah people from the Upper Hunter Valley in NSW. Cancer Council NSW's respect symbol was designed by Marcus Lee, a descendant of the Karajarri people.



Cancer Council NSW acknowledges Traditional Custodians of Country and recognises the continuing connection to lands, waters and communities. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and to Elders past, present and emerging.

