

## Cancer: Early detection is the key

Some types of cancer do not present any symptoms until they are in advanced stages. This is why cancer screening is vital for cancer prevention, says Dr Harsh Dua on World Cancer Day

Cancer is a leading cause of death around the world. Cancer is a disease which can affect almost any part of the body. There are numerous types of cancer which are characterized by the type of the cell which is initially affected. **What causes cancer?** Cancer is caused by the damaged cells that grow uncontrollably and unlike normal cells, these cells do not have a programmed death. Instead they continue to grow and divide leading to a mass of abnormal cells causing the formation of tumors. **Symptoms of cancer** The symptoms of cancer are varied and depend on the type of cell affected, where it has spread and how big the tumor is. Although each type has its own set of characteristics, there are some cancer symptoms that occur in many types of cancer. Some types of cancer do not present any symptoms until they are in advanced stages. This is why cancer screening and risk assessment are vital for cancer prevention and early detection. A broad spectrum of non-specific cancer symptoms may include:

**Persistent fatigue:** Fatigue is a symptom of both malignant and non-malignant conditions and should be evaluated by a physician.

**Unintentional weight Loss:** Losing 10 pounds or more unintentionally definitely warrants a visit to the doctor. This type of weight loss can occur with or without loss of appetite.

**Pain:** Lower back pain is associated with ovarian cancer and colon cancer. Shoulder pain can be a symptom of lung cancer. Pain in the form of headaches can be associated with brain tumors. Stomach pains can be related to stomach cancer, pancreatic cancer.

**Fever:** Fevers are commonly associated with leukemia and lymphoma, but are also common in people whose cancer has spread.

**Chronic cough:** In relation to cancer, a chronic cough with blood or mucus can be symptom of lung cancer. Many cancers can be prevented by avoiding exposure to common risk factors, such as tobacco smoke. In addition, a significant proportion of cancers can be cured, by surgery, radiotherapy or chemotherapy, especially if they are detected early.