

## Public health campaign launched

Exciting results from Health 2020 research have broken new ground in our understanding of cancer development. The results also underpin a media campaign with a frank message for Australians about obesity and cancer.

The Obesity Campaign was developed by the Cancer Council when results from Health 2020 showed a link between waist measurement and cancer risk.

The TV advertisement shows a father being urged by his daughter to measure his waist. It tells viewers that a waist measurement over 100 cm for men and over 85 cm for women is linked to an increased risk of some cancers. People with bigger waists are urged to take steps to reduce their weight.

It's a simple message and the Cancer Council is pleased with the response to the campaign. More people are aware of the link between weight and cancer, and are taking steps to do something about it.

People who volunteered for Health 2020 had their waists measured in their first interview.

This was one of several measures taken: others included weight, waist-to-hip ratio, body mass index, fat mass and percentage fat.

Health 2020 researchers including Dr Robert MacInnis looked at these measurements and risk of cancer. They found that waist circumference was linked to higher risk for some cancers (see interview with Robert on page 2).

Furthermore, the researchers say that for people who are overweight, every 10 cm increase in waist circumference increases cancer risk by 6% for men and 8% for women.

The Obesity Campaign is just one way in which Health 2020 is bearing fruit.

People can ring the Cancer Council Helpline on 13 11 20 or visit the Cancer Council website at [www.cancervic.org.au](http://www.cancervic.org.au) to find out more about the Obesity Campaign: order an obesity prevention pack, fill out the obesity survey and read tips for leading a healthier life.



## How to measure your waist

- Have the tape around your stomach halfway between your lowest rib and the top of your hipbone, about in line with your belly button.
- Have the tape on your skin – undress or lift your clothes.
- Measure when you breathe out. Don't hold your breath (and stomach) in.
- Let the tape be firm around your waist, but don't tighten it.

## Showing people how to reduce their risk

The Obesity Campaign is the first public health campaign to result from Health 2020. The message to reduce waist size may in time become as important as the well-known messages about smoking and sun protection.

Health 2020 was set up to find ways to help people reduce their cancer risk. We wanted to look at diet and lifestyle, because these are things that people can change. Health 2020 researchers carefully analysed the weight information we gathered, alongside figures about deaths from cancer and other diseases.

The results were taken up by the Cancer Council, which has worked on Quit and SunSmart campaigns for many years.

Health 2020 researchers are delighted to present information that people can use to help reduce their cancer risk. We also congratulate Dr Robert MacInnis for his commendation for the 2007 Premier's Award.

### Tips to lose weight

- Drink water instead of soft drinks and fruit juice.
- Put less food on your plate – try using smaller plates.
- Snack on fruit and vegetables.
- Aim to exercise for at least 30 to 60 minutes every day.

Professor Graham Giles  
Chief Investigator, Health 2020

# Researcher commended

The Health 2020 team was delighted when researcher Dr Robert MacInnis received a commendation in the 2007 Premier's Award.

The award is an initiative of the Victorian Government and the Australian Society for Medical Research. It is open to PhD students and recent postgraduates; Robert's work was part of his PhD thesis.

Robert is honoured to have received the commendation. Very few researchers in public health receive such recognition.

Robert wanted to find out more about obesity as a risk factor for certain cancers. In particular, he wanted to see whether waist measurement would give a better idea of risk than other ways of measuring body fat, such as body mass index (BMI). (BMI measures a person's weight in relation to their height.)

Robert's main discovery was that waist circumference is more strongly related to risk of cancer than the more commonly used BMI and that it is strongly related to several cancers.

'Other studies had suggested this

might be true, but this was the first comprehensive work for a range of cancers. These findings suggest that distribution of body fat, rather than fat itself, is important in influencing risk.

'Larger waist circumference increased the risk for cancers of the colon, breast, lower oesophagus and part of the stomach (cardia) and myeloid leukaemia, and moderately increased the risk for cancers of the prostate ("aggressive" forms), rectum, pancreas (among non-smokers) and bladder.'

Robert hopes the Cancer Council Obesity Campaign will help people to understand more about preventable cancer risks.

'The campaign will help raise awareness of the links between cancer and obesity: especially the significance of waist circumference. Obesity can more often than not be prevented through lifestyle.

'We can't always influence our family history or other environmental factors, but we can take responsibility for developing healthy habits that can help us prevent cancer.'



# What we've been doing

Health 2020 began in 1990. We interviewed thousands of people, asking them questions about factors such as diet, exercise, alcohol and smoking.

We began contacting all of those people in 2002 for the follow-up. We have now re-interviewed 68% of the people we originally interviewed.

Around 10% of people from the original group have died. This is not unexpected: many people were approaching 70 years of age when we first met them.

For our analysis of Health 2020 data to be effective, we need to follow up at least 75% of the people we originally interviewed. The more people we can re-interview, the more accurate our information will be.

About 8% of people have not answered our invitation for follow-up. We don't know if this is because they have moved and not given us their new address, or they just don't want to be involved any more. Over the next six months we'll be trying to reach these people. If you know anyone in Health 2020 who we have missed, please encourage them to contact us – even if it's just to say that they don't want to be in the follow-up. We appreciate any contact. We are asking some new questions of people: about acne, allergy, asthma, family history of cancer and gastro-oesophagus reflux disease. This is because our researchers want to find out even more about diet, lifestyle and disease.

You may receive a call inviting you to photocopy your hands. This is for research on finger length

and disease. Finger length may be related to exposure to hormones in the womb before birth, which may be linked to some diseases. It sounds like an odd request, but we have a good reason!

About 900 people have been participating in a study to measure the accuracy of the dietary questionnaires that we have been using. The information we collect will improve our study of how diet is related to risk of cancer and other diseases. It will also give us excellent information on what people are actually eating. We thank these people for their help.

## Your involvement is vital

Results from Health 2020 have triggered a major public health campaign. Every single person in Health 2020 is important and we urge you to stay involved.

Information that you give us may result in new ideas about cancer prevention. We invite you to remain a part of Health 2020 and help us to find out how people can live more healthily. Whether you're sick or have remained well, please stay involved. Every person is vital to Health 2020.

## Your privacy is protected

We make sure your Health 2020 information is kept private and confidential. Your information is stored safely at The Cancer Council Victoria. Your name and address do not appear on data used by researchers – they see only an ID number. No information that could identify you is given to anyone without your specific written consent.

# Major research projects within Health 2020

## Cancer

Led by Graham Giles at The Cancer Council Victoria

## Heart disease and stroke

Led by Kerin O'Dea at Melbourne University and Andrew Tonkin at Monash University

## Diabetes

Led by Kerin O'Dea and Allison Hodge at Melbourne University

## Eye-related disease

Led by Robyn Guymer and Tien Wong at the Centre for Eye Research Australia

## Osteoarthritis

Led by Flavia Cicuttini at Monash University

## Haemochromatosis (iron disease)

Led by Lyle Gurrin at Melbourne University and Katie Allen at the Murdoch Children's Research Institute

## Reflux disease

Led by Dallas English at The Cancer Council Victoria

*Do you have any questions about Health 2020? We like to hear from you! Please telephone on 9635 5323 or email [Health2020@cancervic.org.au](mailto:Health2020@cancervic.org.au)*

# Let us know if your details change

It's really important to us that you let us know if you move house. It means we can stay in touch to let you know how Health 2020 is progressing, what we're finding out, and about new activities underway.

Keeping your address up to date with Health 2020 is a little easier now. Please just tear off this strip, put it in your wallet, on the fridge or in your diary and then send it to us when you know your new address.

First name

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Middle name

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Last name

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**New address**

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Preferred Phone No

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**Old address**

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Send to: 22 Victoria Street Carlton Vic 3053

# Recent publications

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