

What is cancer?

By Daniel Rubin, ND

Many people have often wondered what the answer to this question is. Cancer is slowly becoming the number one disease that people in the United States succumb to, but I have found that all people with cancer do not really understand what it means to have cancer nor how a cancer develops.

Nor do I think that everybody with cancer actually stops to think about these issues. Understanding not only these particular issues but the reason for requiring such information as well, is important for anyone with cancer.

1. Cancer is a part of one's body. Cancer arises from tissues already inside one's body (e.g. someone does not necessarily become 'infected' with cancer and then grows a tumor). Thus the cancer is part of one's self.
2. This means that the *once normal* tissues in the body somehow turned cancerous and to do so there had to be some type of influence on the tissues that turned cancerous from normal in order to induce such a change. This influence can be genetic, environmental, viral or other.
3. This change is a result of a long process in the body that, for a period of time could be resisted by the body, but eventually it overwhelmed the body's defenses and the local cells became cancerous.
4. Becoming cancerous only means that there was some type of influence on the genes in one's cells and somewhere along the way, the DNA in those genes were damaged. This damage caused the cell to behave improperly and when the cell divided (as all cells normally do, some cells more frequently than others) the new cell also bore the same damaged DNA. And so on, and so on....
5. Cancer is not a entirely a single cellular disease. Although a cancer usually arises from one type of cell (colon cancer or ovarian cancer, for instance) it is a multifactorial event that usually arises from some type of immune system malfunction.
6. Because the cancer is part of a person, the rest of their body does not necessarily 'see' the cancer as foreign; thus when the immune system is patrolling the body, the white blood cells sometimes bypass the cancerous cells.
7. Because the cancer can sometimes evade the immune system, it is able to establish itself, grow and proliferate, thus establishing itself as a tumor.

It is crucial for someone with cancer to understand these seven points so one can better understand how, and perhaps, why, they developed a cancer. After one realizes these points and is able to answer the 'how and why' that follow, they may understand better, how to begin the healing process from their cancer.