Good nutrition is a key factor in preventing cancer, however, more can be done to make healthier lifestyles easier to follow, writes Andrea Bertocco from Herbalife.

The scourge of cancer needs no introduction. Most people will know of someone who has undergone cancer treatment, or maybe they themselves have suffered from this terrible disease.

With COVID-19 currently dominating the headlines, it’s easy to forget that cancer is the second leading cause of death globally and was responsible for an estimated 9.6 million deaths in 2018, according to the World Health Organization.
In addition to the emotional pain of battling cancer, treatment and management exert a huge financial burden on our already struggling health systems. Health spending on cancer care doubled from €52 billion to €103 billion in Europe between 1995 and 2018, while per-capita health spending on cancer increased by 86 percent from €105 to €195.[1]

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With this in mind, it’s not surprising that governments are struggling to reduce the burden of healthcare costs on public finances and simultaneously improve the population’s health and well-being. The key lies in prevention. After all, we know that over 40 percent of cancer cases are preventable[2].

Striving for more

According to the recently launched Europe’s Beating Cancer Plan, “adopting healthy lifestyles can greatly lower people’s risk of getting cancer”[3]. Promoting healthy living should therefore be at the centre of Europe’s political agenda, with healthy diets and physical activity playing leading roles.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen has asked how we can live a healthier lifestyle. There is no silver bullet; successful prevention measures can only succeed if they are fully integrated and address our sedentary lifestyles, while also ensuring that healthy foods are accessible for all EU citizens.

"Understanding basic nutritional requirements and being able to differentiate between empty calories and nutrient dense foods is essential knowledge that should be part of education curricula and campaigns across Europe"

Promoting healthy diets: good nutrition is better than a cure

Good nutrition is a cornerstone of good health. However, consumers are very often unaware of how their diet impacts their health. When they do decide to take control of their diets, the support and information they need is frequently lacking; providing this education is one of the key pillars of Herbalife Nutrition’s Nutrition for Zero Hunger initiative.

Understanding basic nutritional requirements and being able to differentiate between empty calories and nutrient dense foods is essential knowledge that should be part of education curricula and campaigns across Europe.

While the food industry, general practitioners and dietitians encourage people to incorporate healthy foods into their diets, nutrition education remains an essential prerequisite to help European citizens
make the right choices for their health. This is why it must feature as a key pillar of the Beating Cancer Plan.

EU policymakers, together with experts in the field, can help spread the culture of prevention by educating younger generations about the benefits of a healthy lifestyle and drive awareness of the role of nutrition in tackling a number of chronic diseases.

**Placing good nutrition within reach: how meal replacements and fortified foods can help**

Delivering good nutrition also requires an environment that puts healthy foods within reach, by offering alternatives and making it easier for people to adhere to nutritious diets.

Healthy homemade meals are always the preferred option, but our modern lifestyles don’t always allow us to cook with fresh ingredients and get all the nutrients we need from the food we eat. This is why the food industry has been working on providing innovative alternatives such as ‘nutrition on the go’ and meal replacements – solutions that combine with the advice of dieticians and others to deliver the key macro and micronutrients people need every day.

"Prioritising nutritional education within the Beating Cancer Plan’s pillar on prevention would be a meaningful step towards promoting healthy lifestyles in Europe and supporting the fight against cancer"

However, significant groups remain at risk of deficiency or failing to achieve optimal nutrient intakes. This impacts health outcomes, particularly for vulnerable groups of people and those experiencing social deprivation who tend to have less healthy diets.

Targeted use of meal replacements and fortified foods is a cost-effective way to bridge this gap between dietary recommendations and current intakes and should be a part of the prevention measures within the Beating Cancer Plan, making the healthy choice the easy choice for all.

It’s time to make good nutrition a social norm in Europe. The fight against cancer cannot wait.


**About the author**

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