

Reduce Your Cancer Risk: Twelve Steps to a Healthier Life

Barbara Boughton

Michael Stefanek

Thomas Hastings, Marketer

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The word “cancer” conjures frightening images of pain, suffering, and loss. In *Reduce Your Cancer Risk*, Barbara Boughton and Michael Stefanek combat the fear of cancer with a wealth of information and practical advice that individuals can use to assess and reduce their cancer risk.

The book covers a range of cancer topics, from risk and risk reduction, to treatment and recovery. One wonderful section addresses how to calculate risk and what the percentages so often referred to in discussions of cancer really mean. For example, the authors discuss a study, cited by the director of Berlin’s Max Planck Institute for Human Development, which followed 2,000 people for ten years, half of whom received a cancer screening test. Of this group, three died of cancer. Of the 1,000 who were not screened, four died of cancer. The study concluded a 25% risk reduction for people screened for cancer—but the actual difference was just one in 1,000. The authors recommend specific assessment tools (available on the web), and emphasize the importance of gathering a family medical history.

In keeping with its subtitle, *Reduce Your Cancer Risk* provides information on some specific cancer prevention strategies. Each of the twelve chapters provides discussion of a topic, if not a specific action step. The dangers of sun exposure and tobacco use are given a great deal of attention, along with the importance of nutrition, exercise and avoiding obesity, and the link between cancer and certain types of infection. Other topics include: preventative treatments, how to decrease the chances for reoccurrence in cancer survivors, screening tests, recognizing environmental carcinogens, and how to reduce stress and stay positive. The book concludes with advice on how to make a health plan work, an appendix on how to evaluate scientific evidence, and a comprehensive index.

The authors have succeeded in writing a book that is packed with clear and useful information without being overly full of medical jargon or overly simplistic. Ms. Boughton is a medical and health journalist specializing in cancer. Dr. Stefanek has worked at Johns Hopkins, the National Cancer Institute, and the American Cancer Society. Both write in a realistic and honest style. For example, Ms. Boughton, when discussing an assessment that recommended she add more vegetables to her diet, writes; “I considered making the vegetable that I detested, broccoli, my best friend but quickly discarded the thought. The next time I was at the grocery store, though, I picked up a bottle of multivitamins, along with my Diet Pepsi and ice cream sandwiches, as well as a handful of prepackaged vegetables.” Such candor about the difficulties of changing long-standing eating habits makes the book more accessible—and credible—to the average reader.

Rather than focus on worst-case cancer scenarios, this book aims instead to reduce fear as well as risk. For anyone who has ever been touched by cancer, or anyone who fears that cancer could be waiting in the future, this book is a must-read.

CATHERINE THURESON (November 18, 2010)

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