

# Cancer: Be aware, not afraid

A toolkit to help employees be proactive about cancer



## Educating employees to dispel fears and combat cancer

Cancer is frightening to people. Even the word “cancer” can make people uncomfortable. It’s as though they think saying the word makes them more vulnerable to the disease. But the opposite is true: ignoring or trying to hide from cancer gives the disease more opportunity to destroy lives.

Researchers around the world have produced so many life-saving advances in recent years. But the global impact of cancer is still grim:

- Cancer is the second leading cause of death globally, and was responsible for 9.6 million deaths in 2018.<sup>1</sup>
- The number of new cases is expected to rise by about 70 percent over the next two decades.<sup>1</sup>
- Late-stage presentation and lack of access to diagnosis and treatment are common.<sup>1</sup>

The last point is really the heart of this awareness campaign. For many types of cancer, death is not inevitable. It can be the result of lack of action and access to proper screening and treatment in the early stages of cancer.

Breast and colorectal cancer (or colon cancer) are among the top five causes of cancer deaths. Cancer may be fatal if left untreated. Cancers have high remission rates when detected early and treated accordingly. Lifestyle changes may even prevent cancers from ever happening.<sup>1</sup>

In this employee awareness campaign, we’ll focus on these three types of cancer: skin, breast, and colon.

The information in this campaign is incredibly important to the well-being of your entire workforce. And it makes good business sense to encourage cancer awareness and compliance with cancer screening (testing) recommendations.

You can make a difference in raising awareness and promoting early detection. MetLife has created this employee education campaign — *Cancer: Be aware, not afraid* — which we hope will clear up a lot of misinformation and fear surrounding cancer — what it is, how to prevent it, early detection and treatment options.

## What’s in the toolkit?

- Campaign objectives
- Marketing materials
- Employer best practices and sponsored events for employees

### Campaign objectives:

- Educate employees about their power to combat cancer
- Dispel fears about screening tests like mammograms and colonoscopies to improve compliance with screening guidelines

### Marketing materials:

#### 1. Campaign emails

- **Week 1:** Is cancer inevitable or preventable?
- **Week 2:** Breast cancer: From self-exam to mammogram
- **Week 3:** UV radiation: What you can’t see can hurt you
- **Week 4:** Get moving to prevent colon cancer

#### 2. Short articles

- What is cancer?
- Skin cancer: Recommended lifestyle changes
- Breast cancer: Recommended lifestyle changes
- Colon cancer: Recommended lifestyle changes

#### 3. Flyers

- Early detection. Early detection. Early detection.
- Don’t let mammograms scare you to death
- Don’t let colonoscopies scare you to death
- Common myths about skin cancer

## Employer best practices and sponsored events for employee awareness

As a corporate policy and practice, make sure that all health plans that you contract with ensure zero out-of-pocket costs for colonoscopies, even when polyps are discovered during the procedure or a colonoscopy is needed as follow-up to an abnormal screening. These terms can be negotiated during the contracting process.

Select health plans that promote regular screening and practice innovative evidence-based strategies to drive utilization, such as patient and provider reminders.

Find out what your medical associations recommend for regular cancer screenings. Survey employees to see how close you are to meeting these targets across your workforce. If you're not meeting the target, consider extending this campaign to try to improve compliance rates. Here are other things you can do to support and encourage screening compliance:

- Offer paid time off for employees ages 50 and older (and younger employees at high risk) to get screening (particularly for procedures like a colonoscopy, that can take a day and involve sedation).
- Consider offering a paid day for employees who need to drive a family member to and from their colon cancer screening



### Breast Cancer

- Sponsor a talk by a primary care doctor or women's healthcare specialist (OB/GYN) on breast cancer
- Hold a breast cancer awareness day and hand out pink ribbon pins, magnets, or other items
- Remember that men can also be great champions for breast cancer awareness, and there are lots of great items for men, like sports bottles, that carry this message



### Colon Cancer

- If you have a company cafeteria or a catering company that prepares food for company-sponsored events, work with them to improve food choices (remember that healthier food choices tie back to other health issues, including heart disease, diabetes, and gut health).
- Add signage in the cafeteria that illustrates how to put together a "healthy plate" of food



### Skin Cancer

- Hand out free samples of sunscreen with an information sheet on UV protection
- Make UV-treated hats with your logo for employees
- Find a vendor who will set up a display of UV-protection clothing: arm sleeves (yes, arm sleeves!), sunglasses, hats, umbrellas, swim coverups, etc.
- Offer a skin self-examination guide, such as the one offered by the American Society for Dermatologic Surgery

1. <https://www.who.int/en/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/cancer>, September 2018

2. <http://www.skincancer.org/skin-cancer-information/skin-cancer-facts>, April 2020

3. American Cancer Society, Inc., National Colorectal Roundtable, "80% Screening Goal: What Can Employers Do to Advance the Shared Goal to Screen 80% of Adults Ages 50 or Older for Colon Cancer?" 2017

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