



Tracking Cancer Nationwide

Dr. Alpa Patel

**Strategic Director, Cancer Prevention Study,
American Cancer Society // Atlanta, Georgia**

Alpa Patel wants to know how cancer is linked to our diet and exercise routines—and what we need to do to keep ourselves healthy and cancer-free.

Patel is the strategic director of the American Cancer Society's Cancer Prevention Study. Previous population surveys helped prove links between cancer and cigarette smoking, secondhand smoke and obesity. Now Patel is signing up 500,000 U.S. residents between the ages of 30 and 65 who've never had cancer for a study that will track them for 20 to 30 years. The study, officially launched in 2006, has about 70,000 participants enrolled so far. Researchers take medical and family histories and a blood sample. They also examine lifestyle information.

The first set of results won't become available for a few years, but Patel already is looking forward to getting her hands on the data. "This is going to be a gold mine," she says, particularly for her specific area of study in weight control and physical activity.

"One of my big questions is, 'What things are people doing—even if they aren't at their ideal body weight—that are beneficial?'" she says. This is particularly important in the United States, where 66 percent of the adult population is now considered overweight.

Patel is very interested in the importance of daily exercise, and not just the treadmill running we do at the gym. The American Cancer Society's guidelines suggest exercising several days a week for at least 30 minutes in moderate to high intensities. "But maybe what we should be telling people to do is light-intensity activities every day," she says. Perhaps our sedentary lifestyles are more harmful than the obesity that comes in part from that inactivity.

"We need to look at the harmful effects of sitting for long periods of time on our muscles and organs," she says. Lab researchers are looking at what happens to rats when they are sedentary and their muscle tissues aren't in use. Rats may provide insight into human physiology.

Patel hopes the study will help researchers understand how cancers are affected by obesity and inactivity. "For instance, [we believe] that obesity and cancer are highly suggestive, but we don't have evidence to support it," she says. "We can't prevent cancer from happening today ... but we can look at how to prevent it in the next generation." //



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A Patient's Story //

Chef Grant Achatz overcomes oral cancer thanks to a unique combination of treatments.

The Diagnosis

When Grant Achatz was diagnosed with stage-IV oral cancer in July 2007, the first three doctors he saw told him surgery was the only cure. They said most of his tongue would have to be removed—a particularly tragic loss for Achatz, owner and chef of Alinea, a Chicago restaurant.

A New Approach

It wasn't until his fourth opinion, at the **University of Chicago Medical Center**, that Achatz was given another option: an experimental combination of radiation, chemotherapy and a new drug called ERBITUX. Head and neck cancer expert Dr. Everett Vokes considered surgery the last line of defense for Achatz, not the first. "The standards of cancer treatment are changing," Vokes says. "With this treatment approach, we were able to offer the chance of a cure while preserving his tongue."

The Results

Vokes, along with a team of surgical, medical and radiation oncologists, treated Achatz for several months. Throughout his treatment, Achatz continued to work at Alinea, designing dishes by smell instead of taste. By the end of 2007, he announced he was cancer-free. In 2008, he received the James Beard Foundation Outstanding Chef Award.

To learn more about cancer treatment at UCMC, visit uchospitals.edu. //

● 2001

The Food and Drug Administration approves the drug GLEEVEC for the treatment of chronic myeloid leukemia, a cancer of the white blood cells. It is one of the first drugs that attacks only cancer cells, not normal cells.

● 2003

Researchers discover that breast cancer stem cells may hold the key to the cancer's spread.

● 2004

The American Cancer Society finds that obesity/being overweight causes 90,000 cancer deaths per year.

● 2004

A new screening test for colon cancer detects specific gene abnormalities in up to 52 percent of patients with the disease.

● 2006

The FDA approves a new vaccine against the strains of the human papillomavirus that cause most cases of cervical cancer.