

Video transcript: Know your enemy – Cancer

Hi, welcome to another Museum of Human Disease “Know Your Enemy” video.

Here I have a museum specimen displaying a tumour, or cancer, but the language of cancer can be confusing. In medicine, the development of a new growth is called neo-, or new, and –plasia, or growth, and usually means the development of a tumour.

Now, a tumour can be benign meaning that it stays in the one place and remains separate from the tissue around it, like in this prostate. Or it can be malignant, meaning that it can grow into the surrounding tissue and spread to other areas of the body. For doctors, only malignant tumours are called cancer. Although for most of us, benign tumours are cancer as well. For example, some skin cancers.

Normally, cells grow and multiply in a controlled way. However, sometimes when a cell’s genetic code changes, cells become abnormal and keep growing. These abnormal cells develop into a mass called a tumour, or cancer. This can happen because of inherited genes, or exposure to chemicals or radiation.

The leading causes of non-inherited cancer are tobacco use, poor diet, lack of exercise, being overweight, or sun exposure. These are your enemies.