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Rising obesity blamed for 23,000 cancer cases every year

Chris Smyth Health Editor

Britain's obesity crisis is to blame for 23,000 cases of cancer a year and is on course to overtake smoking as the main preventable cause of the disease, researchers have warned.

A third of cancers stem from unhealthy living, with one in 16 now down to being overweight or obese, according

to the most detailed estimates yet. More than 2,500 cases a week could be avoided if people shunned tobacco, alcohol, bad diets and other habits now known to cause the disease, Cancer Research UK calculations published today suggest.

Smoking remains the biggest lifestyle cause of cancer, responsible for 54,000 cases — 15.1 per cent — annual-

ly, but the toll is falling as more people kick the habit.

Being overweight is second, causing 6.3 per cent of all cancers in Britain. This rises to 7.5 per cent among women, with obesity linked to breast and womb cancer. The 23,000 toll is up from an estimated 17,000 cases seven years ago.

Britons have become too accustomed to people being overweight and must

realise what a normal size looks like, Cancer Research UK said as it dismissed accusations of "fat-shaming".

Sir Harpal Kumar, the charity's chief executive, said weight was "potentially the new smoking if we're not careful... My sense would be it will be some time in the next couple of decades that we'll see those two switch around."

Scientists looked at international evi-

dence on causes of cancer and used the size of that known risk and data on British lifestyles to estimate what proportion of the UK's 359,547 cancer cases in 2015 could have been avoided.

Results published in the *British Journal of Cancer* show that 37.7 per cent are the result of lifestyle. Sir Harpal said: "Leading a healthy life doesn't

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Theresa May in Brussels for a European Council summit. She told EU leaders that the Salisbury poisoning was part of a pattern of Russian aggression against the West

May's EU allies prepare to expel Russian diplomats

● Moscow spy rings under threat from coalition ● Poisoned victims face permanent brain damage

Francis Elliott Political Editor
Bruno Waterfield Brussels
Deborah Haynes, John Simpson

Russia's spy networks across Europe were under threat last night as at least five EU countries prepared to follow Britain and expel diplomats in response to the Salisbury poisoning.

The move came as Theresa May attempted to unify all 28 countries behind a statement blaming Moscow for the attempted murder of the former Russian spy Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia. President Grybauskaitė

of Lithuania gave the first public hint of co-ordinated action as she joined Mrs May and other leaders at a European Council summit in Brussels, saying that she was "considering" expulsions.

Last night Donald Tusk, the council president, tweeted that its members agreed with Britain that it was "highly likely Russia is responsible for the attack and that there was no other plausible explanation".

Latvia and Estonia, are also preparing to expel diplomats, according to sources. France and Poland were said to have vowed to take concrete action in

the coming days, and Germany hinted that it too would take measures as part of efforts to send "a strong common message from Europeans to Russia".

The Skripals, who are in hospital under sedation, may have suffered permanent brain damage in the attack on March 4. It also emerged that Ms Skripal, 33, is thought to have briefly regained consciousness after being admitted to hospital. Detective Sergeant Nick Bailey, 38, who was exposed to the novichok nerve agent, was released from hospital yesterday.

Mrs May warned European leaders

that the poisoning "was part of a pattern of Russian aggression against Europe and its near neighbours from the western Balkans to the Middle East".

She held a meeting with Angela Merkel, the German chancellor, and President Macron of France before a dinner at which the EU's response was to be formally discussed.

"France said it was ready if Theresa May wanted it to be even more explicit in her support," a senior French diplomatic source said. "Some countries like France are ready for possible measures,

Take it from people who know: older is not wiser

Oliver Moody Science Correspondent
Emma Chapman

"With age comes wisdom," declared Oscar Wilde. "But sometimes age comes alone."

He was right. Scientists have found that growing older is no guarantee of growing wiser, if wisdom is an intuitive knack for grasping how others think and behave. The old did no better than the young in a test of how well they understood human foibles such as the way people tend to work harder in a group than on their own.

The most adept "natural psychologists" were clever, gloomy, doubt-riddled introverts in the mould of Philip Larkin or Harper Lee. Anton Gollwitzer, a graduate student at Yale University, Connecticut, said: "Take, for instance, the novelist Ernest Hemingway, or the founder of modern psychology, William James. Without empirical backing, these individuals were able to accurately capture and communicate deep social human truths."

Social psychology is sometimes dismissed as the art of confirming things your grandmother could have told you. Yet Mr Gollwitzer says the discipline's findings are often counterintuitive.

Taking out aggression on a symbolic target, for example, tends only to make people angrier. In another phenomenon called the bystander effect, the more people who walk past an individual in distress, the less likely any single person is to step in and help.

Mr Gollwitzer and his supervisor, John Bargh, tested 1,143 participants on whether they were any good at identifying the irrational tendencies of their fellow human beings. The best performers were those who were more questioning of themselves and more willing to toy with new ideas. The skill did not improve with age.

"The lack of a relationship does suggest that the number of experiences one has had in the world does not seem to heighten one's ability to infer how most people think and behave in social contexts," Mr Gollwitzer said. The findings are published in *Social Psychology*.

WIKTOR DABKOWSKI/ZUMA PRESS/ALAMY LIVE NEWS

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