Kate Middleton’s cancer disclosure underscores troubling rise of disease in younger adults

Just this month, two young, high-profile public figures announced that they have cancer. First, Olivia Munn, 43, disclosed that she was treated for breast cancer after catching it early. Days later, Kate Middleton, 42, announced she has been receiving treatment for an unspecified form of cancer.

Their diagnoses spotlight a troubling trend: both in the U.S. and around the world, cancer diagnoses are growing more common among adults younger than 50. By 2030, one recent study estimated, the number of these early-onset cancer diagnoses could increase by roughly 30% worldwide—and the number of people who die from their conditions could rise by about 20%.

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[Dr. Matthew Triplette, a pulmonologist at Fred Hutch Cancer Center in Seattle] says he doubts there’s "some new, very dangerous cancer risk factor out there that’s causing tons of excessive cases in younger folks.” Cancer is a complex disease influenced by a mixture of genetics, lifestyle choices, and environmental exposures, so it’s unlikely that there’s a single explanation for the data.

Instead, it’s likely a mix of things. Eating lots of processed foods, not getting enough exercise, and drinking too much alcohol are all risk factors for cancer, and all of those issues are widespread in modern life.

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