

# lifestyle & cancer

Half of all cancers could be prevented by changes to lifestyle.

**More than one in three people in the UK will develop cancer during their lifetime.**

Most cases are in people over 60. But the habits we adopt earlier in life can alter our risk – sometimes dramatically.

This leaflet contains some information about the lifestyle choices that affect our risk of cancer. And it shows how you can take effective action to reduce your risk.

**If cancer develops, early detection is important.**

This leaflet also includes information about the changes to look out for and about 'cancer screening' tests used by doctors.

reduce *the* risk  
CANCER RESEARCH UK



## Stop smoking

Half of all regular smokers die from smoking-related diseases.

**Smoking causes nearly all cases of lung cancer and is a major risk factor for at least twelve other types of cancer.**

These include cancers of the mouth, voice box, food pipe, stomach, kidney, bladder and pancreas. Smoking also causes heart disease, stroke and chronic lung diseases such as bronchitis and emphysema.

**If you smoke, giving up is the most important thing you can do for your health.**

The earlier you stop the better, but it is never too late to quit. The longer you stay off tobacco, the more you lower your risk of lung cancer.

**Be persistent... quitting for good can take three or more attempts.**

We know it is hard, but support and effective treatments are available to help you quit smoking. Getting support significantly improves your chance of success.

Ask your doctor for advice or freephone the **NHS Smoking Helpline** on **0800 169 0 169** or **Quitline** on **0800 00 22 00**.

Nicotine replacement products help many people stop smoking – you can buy them at your chemist or ask your doctor about getting them on prescription.

## Stay in shape

**Being overweight or obese increases your risk of several cancers, including cancer of the bowel, kidney, food pipe and womb.**

It also increases the risk of breast cancer in women who have been through the menopause.

Try to maintain a healthy body weight. Balance the energy you take in from food with the energy you burn through physical activity.

If you are currently very overweight or have other health problems, talk to your doctor before beginning a weight-loss programme.

## Take some regular exercise

Physical activity has been shown to reduce the risk of bowel cancer and may also reduce the risk of breast cancer.

**Try to take half an hour of moderate activity at least five times a week.**

This can be brisk walking, gardening, swimming, cycling, dancing, jogging or similar whatever you enjoy. Walking all or some of the way to work or the shops is a good way of building exercise into your daily routine. And if you can't manage 30 minutes in one go, break it down into 10 or 15 minute sessions.

## Eat and drink healthily

Our diet affects our risk of certain cancers, including cancer of the stomach, bowel, mouth, and food pipe.

**Following these recommendations for a balanced diet will help reduce your risk of cancer. It will also help protect against other conditions such as heart disease and diabetes:**

- Eat at least five different portions of fruit and vegetables\* every day. They are an excellent source of fibre and vitamins.
- Eat plenty of starchy foods like bread, cereals, rice, pasta and potatoes.
- Boost the fibre in your diet by choosing wholegrain varieties of starchy foods whenever possible.
- Eat smaller and fewer portions of red and processed meat.
- Try to eat more fish instead. When poached or baked it is particularly good for you.
- Be cautious with supplements – they do not substitute for a healthy balanced diet.

\* Notes:

- A portion is approximately 80g of fruit or vegetables
- 80g is the weight of a medium-sized apple
- Potatoes do not count towards your portions; though nutritious they are grouped in the starchy food category
- Pulses (such as lentils or chickpeas) only count as one of your daily portions, however many are eaten
- Fruit juice only counts as one of your daily portions, however much you drink

## Limit your alcohol intake

Drinking alcohol increases the risk of cancers of the mouth, voice box, food pipe, liver and breast.

People who drink alcohol and smoke increase their risk of cancer even more. But drinking small amounts of alcohol, less than two units per day, can reduce your risk of coronary heart disease.

**If you drink alcohol, follow our guidelines:**

- Women should drink less than two units of alcohol each day.
- Men should drink less than three units of alcohol each day.

**Many alcoholic drinks contain more than one unit:**

- A pint of premium lager, beer or cider (5% vol) contains **three** units.
- A standard 175ml glass of wine (11-12% vol) contains **two** units.
- A double shot of spirits (40% vol) using the 35ml measure contains **three** units.

## Be SunSmart

**Too much sun ages your skin and can cause skin cancer.**

People with fair skin, lots of moles, or a family history of skin cancer are at greatest risk. Take extra care with children's skin, it is more easily damaged.

**Most skin cancer cases could be prevented by being SunSmart and taking care not to burn.**

In the summer sun between 11am and 3pm:

- Find shade or cover up with a hat, t-shirt and sunglasses, and
- Use factor 15+ sunscreen on exposed skin.

## Go for cancer screening

**Tests called 'screening' can pick up unusual changes early so that treatment is simpler and more effective. Screening saves lives.**

- **Breast screening** (mammography) is available to all women over the age of 50.
- If you are registered with a doctor you will be invited every three years until you are 70.
- If you are over 70, contact your doctor or breast screening unit who can arrange a screening appointment for you.
- Mammography can detect very small breast cancers that can be treated effectively.
- **Cervical screening** (the smear test) can pick up abnormal cervical changes before cancer develops.
- In general, women are invited for cervical screening every three to five years, from their early twenties to their early sixties.
- **Screening for bowel cancer** will be offered to older men and women from 2006.

## Practise safer sex

**Some sexually transmitted infections can cause cancer.**

The hepatitis B virus is a common cause of cancer that starts in the liver. The virus can be spread through unprotected sex.

Nearly all cases of cervical cancer are caused by Human Papilloma Virus (HPV). HPV infection is very common but most women who have had it will not get cervical cancer.

**You may not know if you or someone else has an infection, so it is best to use a condom.**

## Further information

Visit [www.cancerresearchuk.org/health](http://www.cancerresearchuk.org/health) for more about healthy choices that could reduce your risk of cancer.

All of our messages are based on scientific evidence. To find out more click on 'How do we know'.

Our full range of cancer awareness leaflets, including one about the early signs of cancer, are available to order online at [www.cancerresearchuk.org/leaflets](http://www.cancerresearchuk.org/leaflets)

For more about cancer visit our patient information website [www.cancerhelp.org.uk](http://www.cancerhelp.org.uk)

If you want to talk in confidence about cancer, call our information nurses. Direct line **020 7061 8355** or freephone 0800 CANCER, that is 0800 226237, or email [cancer.info@cancer.org.uk](mailto:cancer.info@cancer.org.uk)

## About Cancer Research UK

Cancer Research UK is the leading charity dedicated to research on the causes, treatment and prevention of cancer. If you would like to support our work please call **020 7121 6699** or visit our website.

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[www.cancerresearchuk.org](http://www.cancerresearchuk.org)  
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