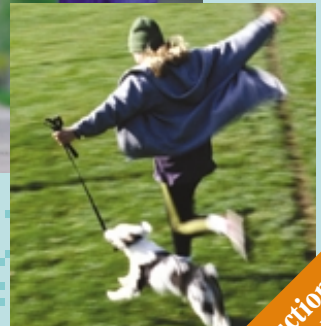


# Healthy & Wise

*A guide to the simple lifestyle steps that can help  
minimise your and your loved ones' risk of cancer*



With an introduction by  
Derek Napier, AICR  
Chief Executive

## Introduction

If there's one thing we can be certain of, it's that cancer is on the rise. Even when we take into account better screening, improved methods of diagnosis and an ageing population, the facts speak for themselves – we have a greater chance than ever of getting cancer at some point in our lives.

But the good news is there are simple steps you can take to help minimise your risk of cancer... and this booklet gives you the information you need to protect yourself and your loved ones as much as possible. Edited by AICR's Science Consultant, Dr Mark Matfield, *'Healthy & Wise'* is an invaluable guide for anyone concerned about cancer.



Derek Napier  
Chief Executive

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## Contents

- |                         |                                    |
|-------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 2 Introduction          | 8 Dietary supplements              |
| 3 Smoking               | 9 Why cancer runs in families      |
| 4 Alcohol               | 10 What you should ask your doctor |
| 5 The sun and your skin | 11 Screening for cancer            |
| 6 Diet                  | 12 Early warning signs             |
| 7 Weight and exercise   |                                    |
-

## Smoking

Smoking causes **nine out of ten** cases of lung cancer (which kills one person every 15 minutes in the UK), and accounts for a **third** of all cancer deaths. Apart from lung cancer, smoking is also a risk factor for cancer of the mouth, throat, oesophagus (food pipe), stomach, kidney, pancreas, cervix, bladder – and even some types of leukaemia.



For smokers, there really is only one solution: stop smoking. The risk of getting lung cancer from smoking is directly related to the number of cigarettes smoked and for how long a person has smoked. Quitting dramatically reduces this risk – if you give up smoking and stay off cigarettes for 10 years, your risk of lung cancer will *halve*.

It's never too late to give up smoking – smokers who quit before the age of 35 have a life expectancy similar to non-smokers, and even stopping in middle age or later has great benefits.

***Help is available to people trying to stop smoking: see your doctor, talk to your pharmacist or call Quitline on 0800 002200.***

## Alcohol

Excessive alcohol consumption over time is a significant risk factor for cancer of the mouth, throat and oesophagus (food pipe) – and may also be a risk factor for breast cancer.

People who drink excessively are at increased risk of liver and bowel cancer as well.

Current government guidelines for sensible drinking advise that women drink no more than **2–3** units per day and men no more than **3–4** units.

One unit of alcohol equals:

- Half a pint of ordinary lager or beer
- A small (100 ml) glass of wine

A standard pub measure of spirits and liqueurs is 35ml – about 1.5 units of alcohol.



***Doctors strongly advise against 'binge drinking' i.e. low or no alcohol consumption during the week followed by heavy drinking at the weekends.***

## The sun and your skin

**More than 60,000** people get skin cancer every year, with **2,000** dying of it – and the numbers are rising. But of all cancers, it's one of the easiest to prevent, by taking simple steps to protect your skin from the sun.

People with fair or freckled skin are most at risk from skin cancer – people with black, Asian and Mediterranean complexions are least at risk. Children's skin is especially vulnerable and extra care should be taken to protect babies from the sun.



To protect yourself and your family from skin cancer, you should:

- Take care not to burn
- Cover up in the sun with loose cotton clothing and wear sun glasses with UV (Ultra-Violet radiation) protection
- Where possible, avoid the midday (11am to 3pm) sun altogether
- Use a sunscreen with an SPF of at least 15
- Remember that children need extra protection. Babies should always wear protective clothing and a hat in the sun
- Avoid using sunbeds – they emit the same harmful UV rays as the sun

***Some people think that a tan helps protect against skin cancer. There is no scientific evidence to support this. However, there is evidence that shows that the sunlight that tans your skin can cause damage to the skin cells.***

## Diet

Scientists think that an unhealthy diet may be linked to around **one third** of all cancer cases, increasing our risk of cancer of the mouth, throat, oesophagus (food pipe), stomach, pancreas and bowel. Breast, lung, bladder, cervical and prostate cancer are also thought to be linked to what we eat.

Healthy eating is one of the simplest lifestyle steps we can take to help reduce our risk of cancer.

A balanced diet should:

- Be high in fruit and vegetables – aim for five portions a day.  
One portion is equivalent to:
  - 1 orange
  - 2 kiwi fruits or tangerines
  - 2 serving spoons of broccoli or carrots
  - A bowl of salad
  - A 250ml glass of fruit juice
- Include foods that are high in fibre, such as brown rice, wholewheat pasta and bread, potatoes, bran-enriched breakfast cereals, and ‘pulses’ such as beans and peas
- Be low in red and processed meat. Try eating chicken, turkey and fish as a source of protein instead of red meat



## Weight and exercise

Being over-weight increases the risk of many cancers, including breast, prostate, colon, pancreatic and cervical cancer. By far the best way of maintaining a healthy body weight is to reduce the amount you eat, but regular exercise is also important. Regular exercise helps keep your weight down and reduces your risk of heart disease, diabetes and cancer.

Aim to do around **30 minutes** of moderate exercise five days per week. Some good forms of moderate exercise are:

- A brisk walk
- Gardening
- Swimming
- Cycling
- Dancing
- Low-impact aerobics



***Scientists believe that regular exercise and a healthy diet may help to protect against a number of cancers. Making a committed lifestyle change in this way can have a major positive impact on your long-term health, protecting you against other serious diseases as well as cancer.***

## *Dietary supplements*

If you are eating a full and varied diet, there is little or no need to take dietary supplements. You should be getting all the vitamins, minerals and other important substances from your diet. However, not everyone eats an ideal diet and many people choose to take supplements to ensure they are getting enough of these important compounds.

Some people go too far and take mega-doses – literally overdoses – of some vitamins and minerals. This can be dangerous and may cause serious illness. Always check the recommended daily allowance (the RDA) for any dietary supplement and do not exceed it.

From the available scientific evidence we cannot tell whether taking dietary supplements will reduce your risk of cancer. However, more research is being done in this area. In the meantime, it may be wise to take certain supplements if you are concerned that they are lacking in your diet.



- Lack of vitamin E may increase your risk of colon, prostate and throat cancers
- Lack of selenium may increase your risk of lung, colon and prostate cancers
- Lack of calcium may increase your risk of colon cancer

## Why cancer runs in families

The first example of cancer running in a family was discovered in 1925. Since then, scientists have discovered that **one quarter** of all cancers may have some inherited risk.

It is important to realise that cancer itself does not run in families. Rather, it is an increased risk of cancer that can be inherited. Research has demonstrated that this increased cancer risk is caused by particular cancer genes that can be passed from parent to child.



In a small number of cases, people inherit a gene that causes a very high risk of cancer. For example, women who inherit the BRCA1 gene have a **three in four (75%)** chance of getting breast cancer. Other high-risk genes are associated with leukaemia and cancer of the ovaries, prostate, brain, bowel, stomach, uterus, skin and the testicles. However, these high-risk cancer genes are rare. In total, they are only responsible for about one in a hundred cancers.

***If several of your blood relatives have had the same type of cancer, it may be worth discussing this with your doctor. There are some DNA tests available and others being developed which can detect high-risk cancer genes.***

## What you should ask your doctor

If you are concerned about any symptoms, the most important thing is that you **DO** talk to your doctor. Far too many people are so afraid that they avoid mentioning it. But it is much, much wiser to tell your doctor. Remember, there can only be two possible results. Either you don't have cancer – which is good news and you can stop worrying. Or, if it is a sign of cancer, you will have caught it as early as possible. The longer you leave cancer, the more difficult it is to cure.

If your symptoms might be due to cancer, your doctor will give you some tests. There are different tests for different cancers and you might have a blood test, a scan, a biopsy or you might have to see a specialist for a diagnosis.

If the results indicate that you do have cancer, there are several important questions that you should ask:

- What type of cancer is it?
- How advanced is my cancer?
- What treatment will I be given?
- How will the cancer affect me?
- How will the treatment affect me?



***A diagnosis of cancer can be very frightening, so it may help to take a friend or partner with you. Be positive and, if you don't understand what your doctor says, ask him or her to explain it again. Together, you and your doctor can find the most suitable and effective treatment for you.***

## Screening for cancer

For some types of cancer, there are screening programmes to help detect the cancers at an early stage when they are easier to cure.

Screening means doing tests on people who have no symptoms of cancer. Catching cancers before there are noticeable symptoms can have a dramatic effect on the success of treatments.



The best-known type of screening is the smear test for cervical cancer. All adult women should have a smear test every three to five years. This test is so accurate it can detect changes before cancer begins.

***The use of cervical screening has reduced the death rate from this cancer by half over the last twenty five years.***

There is also a screening programme for breast cancer which started in 1988. Breast cancer screening is done by mammography – taking an X-ray of the breasts.

The results of this have had a big effect on breast cancer. In different countries, there has been a drop in deaths from breast cancer of between **20%** and **40%** amongst women who undergo screening.

***All women over 50 should have breast screening once every three years.***

## Early warning signs

With over **200** different types of cancer, listing all the symptoms here would not be very helpful. But if you notice or experience any of the following symptoms, you should consult your doctor straight away:

- A new lump anywhere on the body
- A change in the appearance of a mole
- A sore that won't heal
- Persistent coughing or hoarseness (but no other cough symptoms)
- Prolonged constipation or diarrhoea, or both
- Blood in the stool or urine
- Persistent and unexplained pain, ache or indigestion
- Unexplained weight loss
- Needing to urinate frequently at night or difficulty urinating

Many of these symptoms can also be caused by less serious conditions – but if you experience any of them, or have any concerns, contact your doctor immediately.



***Remember: the earlier that cancer is detected, the better your chances of surviving it. That's why it is so important to check yourself regularly – and know exactly what to look out for.***

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