

Cancer is a broad term used to describe a group of more than 200 types of disease that affect different areas of the body. Research has shown that many types of cancer are linked to our diet and lifestyle, which means there are steps we can take to help prevent them. This leaflet is about reducing your risk of oesophageal cancer.

What is oesophageal cancer?

The oesophagus (or gullet) is a tube through which food and drink pass from the throat to the stomach. It lies between the windpipe and the spinal column. The oesophagus moves fluid and food towards the stomach. In an adult, it is roughly 25-30 cm (10-12 inches) long and cancer can develop anywhere along its length.



Oesophageal cancer is divided into two main types, each one making up about half of all cases: **squamous cell carcinoma** (which occurs in the cells that line the oesophagus) and **adenocarcinoma** (which develops in cells that make and release mucus and other fluids in the lower part of the oesophagus). Incidence of adenocarcinoma has increased in the last 20 years.

A number of factors, some lifestyle-related, contribute to the development of oesophageal cancer. There are several lifestyle choices we can make every day to reduce our risk. By not smoking or chewing tobacco, drinking less alcohol, choosing a healthy diet and maintaining a healthy weight we can substantially reduce our chances of developing oesophageal cancer.

Who is most at risk?

There were nearly 8,000 new cases of oesophageal cancer diagnosed in the UK in 2006. It is the ninth most common cancer in the UK and its incidence is rising. Men are twice as likely to get oesophageal cancer as women.



As with all cancers, the risk of developing oesophageal cancer depends on a number of factors and varies from person to person, but lifestyle factors can affect risk of oesophageal cancer. **People who use tobacco, drink alcohol or who are overweight or obese are particularly at risk.**

Experts estimate that by not smoking and drinking alcohol, and by choosing a healthy diet and maintaining a healthy weight, a great proportion of oesophageal cancer cases in the UK could be prevented.

Lifestyle risk factors

- Smoking and chewing tobacco
- Drinking alcohol
- Being overweight or obese
- Diets low in fruit and vegetables



Other risk factors

- Age – the risk increases as you get older. You are unlikely to develop oesophageal cancer if you are under 40.
- Gastric reflux – acid from the stomach travelling up into the oesophagus can lead to a condition called Barrett's oesophagus (where cells in the lower oesophagus change to become acid resistant). This increases your risk, particularly of adenocarcinoma.
- Infection with the bacteria 'Helicobacter pylori' (HP) can increase risk of squamous cell carcinoma but can decrease the risk of adenocarcinoma.

If any of these apply to you, it does not mean that you will develop oesophageal cancer – it just means that your risk may be higher than average. The important thing is that oesophageal cancer is highly preventable.



Reducing your risk

In 2007, we published an Expert Report on preventing cancer. This reviewed the findings of over 7,000 scientific studies on food, nutrition, physical activity and body weight in relation to cancer prevention.

The Report looked at 17 different cancer sites, and found that there are steps we can all take to reduce our risk of oesophageal cancer. Making healthy lifestyle choices, like not smoking or drinking alcohol, and choosing a healthy diet, can have a big impact on our chances of developing the disease. These are the key things we can do to reduce our risk:



Do not smoke or chew tobacco

Limit alcoholic drinks

There is strong scientific evidence that alcohol increases the risk of oesophageal cancer, so for cancer prevention, we recommend not to drink alcoholic drinks. If you do drink alcohol, limit your consumption to **no more than 2 drinks a day for men and 1 drink a day for women.**



Choose a healthy diet

Try to include more vegetables and fruits in your diet. Evidence shows that **vegetables and fruits** probably protect against oesophageal cancer, so we should aim for at least five portions a day.



As part of a healthy diet we should also include wholegrains and pulses (such as beans and lentils), which contain fibre and other nutrients.

Maintain a healthy weight

Try to maintain a healthy weight and limit the amount of weight you gain throughout life. The best way to do this is through a balanced diet and regular physical activity.

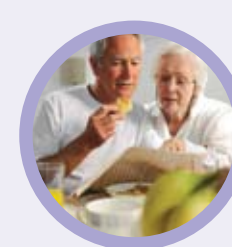
Symptoms to look out for

In the early stages of oesophageal cancer there are likely to be no symptoms. In later stages the symptoms below may be present. These symptoms are not always due to oesophageal cancer, but if you have them, you should consult your doctor.

- ◆ Difficulty swallowing. Food may feel like it's sticking in your throat
- ◆ Pain in your throat, chest or between your shoulder blades
- ◆ Hoarseness, hiccups, and constant coughing
- ◆ Weight loss
- ◆ Vomiting

Early detection

Early detection and diagnosis is important for getting the best treatment for cancer. If you think you may be at a higher than average risk, visit your doctor regularly.



Finding out more

WCRF UK also provides information on reducing the risk of other cancers, as well as practical advice on **choosing a balanced diet, being physically active** and **maintaining a healthy weight**.

Research shows that about a third of the most common cancers could be prevented by making healthy choices in these three areas.

Visit www.wcrf-uk.org or call us on **020 7343 4205** to find out more.

If you want more information on the detection and treatment of oesophageal cancer (or other cancers), we recommend contacting Macmillan Cancer Support. Visit their website, www.macmillan.org.uk, or call 0808 808 2020.



Getting involved!

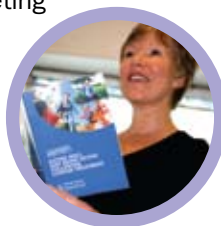
There are many ways you can support the work of WCRF UK. Visit www.wcrf-uk.org/fundraising or call our fundraising team on **020 7343 4200** to find out more.

About WCRF UK

WCRF UK is the principal UK charity dedicated to the prevention of cancer through the promotion of healthy diet and nutrition, physical activity and weight management. WCRF UK is committed to providing cancer research and education programmes which expand our understanding of the importance of our food and lifestyle choices in the cancer process.

By spreading the good news that cancer can be prevented, WCRF UK hopes that many thousands of lives will be saved. The education and research programmes of WCRF UK are funded almost entirely by donations from the public.

This leaflet gives information based on WCRF UK's Recommendations for Cancer Prevention developed from the Expert Report: *Food, Nutrition, Physical Activity, and the Prevention of Cancer: a Global Perspective* (2007). The Report, produced by WCRF/AICR, is the largest study of its kind ever published and its Recommendations are based on the most comprehensive review of all the available evidence. WCRF UK is committed to interpreting scientific research in the field of food, nutrition, physical activity, and cancer prevention and to translating the results into meaningful and practical advice for the public to follow.



Did you know that many cases of cancer could be prevented? For practical information on choosing a healthy diet, managing your weight and becoming more active to help reduce your risk, visit our website:

www.wcrf-uk.org



WCRF UK Recommendations for Cancer Prevention

- 1 Be as lean as possible without becoming underweight
- 2 Be physically active for at least 30 minutes every day
- 3 Avoid sugary drinks. Limit consumption of energy-dense foods (particularly processed foods high in added sugar, or low in fibre, or high in fat)
- 4 Eat more of a variety of vegetables, fruits, wholegrains, and pulses such as beans
- 5 Limit consumption of red meats (such as beef, pork and lamb) and avoid processed meats
- 6 If consumed at all, limit alcoholic drinks to 2 for men and 1 for women a day
- 7 Limit consumption of salty foods and foods processed with salt (sodium)
- 8 Don't use supplements to protect against cancer

Special Population Recommendations

- 9 It is best for mothers to breastfeed exclusively for up to 6 months and then add other liquids and foods
- 10 After treatment, cancer survivors should follow the Recommendations for Cancer Prevention

And, always remember – do not smoke or chew tobacco

REDUCING YOUR RISK OF OESOPHAGEAL CANCER



WCRF UK is part of the WCRF global network

World Cancer Research Fund (WCRF UK)

22 Bedford Square, London WC1B 3HH Tel: 020 7343 4200 Fax: 020 7343 4201

Web: www.wcrf-uk.org Email: wcrf@wcrf.org

Registered in London, England No: 2536180

Registered with the Charity Commission in England and Wales (Registered Charity No: 1000739)

Registered Office: 22 Bedford Square, London WC1B 3HH

“Stopping cancer before it starts”

© 2010 World Cancer Research Fund / WEU20S