

BE CANCER
AWARE  GET CHECKED
EARLY

Be Cancer Aware

Spotting
symptoms
and
reducing
your risk



It is estimated that one in two people will develop some form of cancer during their lifetime. The good news is that cancer survival is improving, with twice as many people surviving cancer compared with 40 years ago.

The most common cancers in Northern Ireland are:

- breast cancer
- lung cancer
- bowel cancer
- prostate cancer
- skin cancer

About this booklet

This booklet will help you:

- recognise some of the key signs and symptoms of cancer
- make healthy changes to reduce your risk of cancer

Further information is available at
www.cruk.org/spot-cancer-early-NI

Get checked early

You should see your GP if you experience any of the symptoms in this booklet, or any other unusual symptoms. Although it's unlikely to be cancer, it's important to speak to a GP so they can investigate. Finding cancer early means it's easier to treat.

Be aware of key cancer symptoms

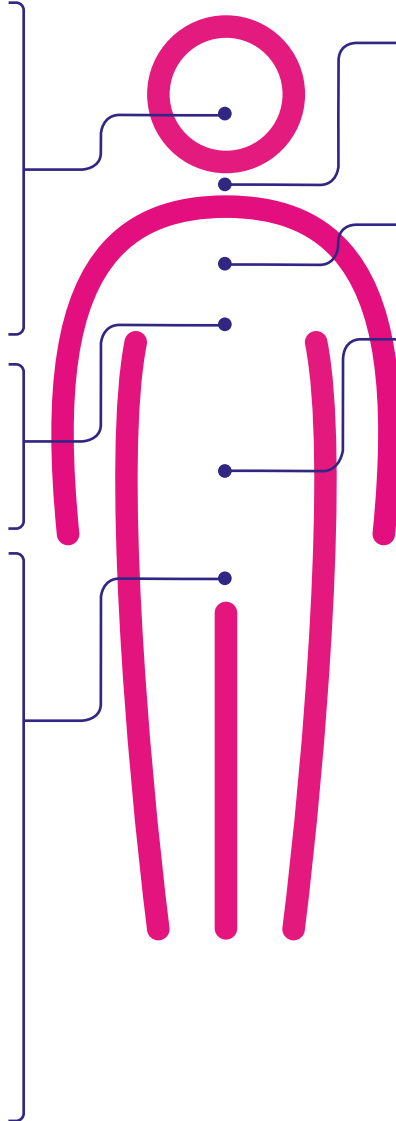
Changes to your body's normal processes or unusual, unexplained symptoms can sometimes be an early sign of cancer. It's important to be body aware and to take action if you notice any unusual changes. The diagram on page 4 shows some things that could be symptoms of cancer. In many cases these symptoms will turn out to be a sign of something far less serious, but if it is cancer, an early diagnosis means treatment is more likely to be successful.

Cancer becomes more common as we get older, with most cases in people aged 50 or over. But whatever your age, it's always best to listen to your body and act on any concerns. You should talk to your GP if something doesn't feel quite right.

Don't let fear of what the doctor might find or feelings of embarrassment stop you from getting checked out. Spotting cancer early increases the chances of treating it successfully.

If something is unusual for you, tell your doctor – even if it is not on this list.

- Croaky voice, hoarseness or a cough that won't go away
- Mouth or tongue ulcer that lasts longer than three weeks
- Coughing up blood
- Unusual changes to the size, shape or feel of a breast, including nipple or skin changes
- A change in bowel habit, such as constipation, looser poo or pooing more often
- Blood in your poo
- Unexplained vaginal bleeding, including after sex, between periods or after the menopause
- Blood in your pee
- Problems peeing



- Breathlessness
- Difficulty swallowing
- Persistent heartburn or indigestion
- Appetite loss
- Persistent bloating
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- Very heavy night sweats
- Fatigue
- Unexplained weight loss
- An unexplained pain or ache
- An unusual lump or swelling anywhere on your body
- A new mole or changes to a mole
- A sore that won't heal
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Reduce your risk of cancer

Your risk of cancer can depend on many different things. Some of these can't be changed, like your genes or age. But there are lots of things that you can do to reduce your risk.

Making some simple healthy changes can significantly reduce your risk of developing cancer. Stopping smoking, eating a healthy diet, taking regular exercise, protecting your skin in the sun and reducing your alcohol intake will all help to lower your risk of cancer. Speak to your pharmacist for advice and further support.

Smoking

Stopping smoking is one of the best things you can do to improve your health. Smoking can cause cancer, including two of the most common, lung and bowel cancer.

The Public Health Agency's website 'Stop Smoking NI' offers a range of information and advice for those wanting to stop smoking, including information on local stop smoking services. See www.stopsmokingni.info

Support is also available in your local community pharmacy and from your GP practice team.

Small changes, big difference

A few small changes to what you eat and drink and to your level of physical activity can make a big difference to your long-term health.

Diet and physical activity

A healthy diet and regular exercise will help you to keep a healthy weight, or lose weight if you need to. This can help you reduce the risk of developing some cancers.

To check you are a healthy weight, you need to measure your waist size and calculate your body mass index (BMI). To learn more, see the 'Measuring up' section on the 'Choose to Live Better' website.

Here you'll also find:

- Top tips on how you can easily make healthier choices.
- Advice on how to set targets.
- Information on what a healthy and balanced diet looks like.

- Lots of healthy recipes to help you and your family eat better.
- Tips to help you get active.

See www.choosetolivebetter.com

If you want to lose weight, do it safely and at a realistic pace – it's the best way to reach your healthy weight and to maintain that weight in the long term.

Care in the sun

Too much ultraviolet (UV) light, either from natural sunlight or from artificial sources such as sunbeds, is the main cause of skin cancers. Many skin cancers are preventable. The best way to enjoy the sun safely and protect your skin from sunburn is to use a combination of shade, clothing and sunscreen.

Find out more about reducing your risk of skin cancer at

www.careinthesun.org

Alcohol

Alcohol can cause weight gain. It is also directly linked to certain types of cancer. There's no completely safe level of drinking, but sticking within the low-risk drinking guidelines lowers your risk of harming your health.

It is recommended to drink no more than 14 units of alcohol a week (men and women), spread evenly across three days or more. These guidelines apply whether you drink regularly, or only occasionally.

Find out how many units of alcohol are in your favourite drinks – an alcohol units guide is available from your pharmacy or get it online at

[www.drugsandalcoholni.info/
alcohol-units](http://www.drugsandalcoholni.info/alcohol-units)

If you have health concerns, talk to your doctor

Making healthy changes can help reduce your risk of developing certain cancers. But it's important to take action if something's not quite right. If you have any of the symptoms in this booklet or any other unusual symptoms, you should talk to your GP.

Don't worry that you might be wasting their time – you are not. If something is unusual for you or won't go away, your doctor will want to hear about it. You may feel uncomfortable talking about

these kinds of things, but your GP is there to help you and will want to speak to you. If you'd prefer a male or a female doctor, you can ask if one is available.

Get checked early

The important thing is that you contact your GP practice and get checked early. The cause of the symptoms is probably not cancer, but if it is, spotting it at an early stage could save your life.



Cancer screening

Cancer screening saves thousands of lives each year. Screening can detect certain cancers before you have any symptoms. Finding cancer early means that treatment has a better chance of success. Cervical screening can even prevent cancer from developing.

In Northern Ireland there are screening programmes for breast, cervical and bowel cancers. To receive an invitation you must be registered with a GP.

Women aged 50 to 70 years are invited for breast screening every three years. Women aged over 70 won't receive routine screening invitations, but can arrange an appointment by contacting their local screening unit.

Cervical screening is offered to women aged 25 to 64 years. Women aged between 25 and 49 are invited every three years and those aged

between 50 and 64 are invited every five years.

A home screening test kit for bowel cancer is sent in the post every two years to people aged 60 to 74 years.

When you receive a screening invitation, you'll also be sent information about the screening test. It's important you read this, so you can decide if you'd like to take part.

Screening saves lives from cancer. For more information on cancer screening programmes visit www.pha.site/early-detection

Remember, cancer screening is for people without symptoms, so if you've noticed a change, don't wait for screening – contact your GP. Early diagnosis of cancer means treatment is more likely to be successful.

For more information on cancer, visit www.cruk.org/spot-cancer-early-NI



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