

Lower Your Cancer Risk Community Toolkit

Learn more about making healthier choices to
lower your risk of developing cancer

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Cancer is something that affects us all. Whether through our own experiences or those of family, friends or colleagues, most of us will know someone whose life has been touched by cancer. While not all cancers can be prevented, there is strong evidence that making healthy lifestyle choices can reduce the risk of developing many types of cancer.

The encouraging news is that it is never too late to make positive changes. Looking after our health is about taking small, achievable steps that can make a real difference over time.

The same lifestyle choices that help reduce the risk of cancer can also lower the risk of other long-term conditions, including heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes and high blood pressure, while improving our overall health and wellbeing.

This toolkit has been developed to provide clear, evidence-based information about cancer risk and the practical actions that can help reduce it. Its purpose is to support informed choices, encourage positive conversations about health, and show that reducing cancer risk is not about being perfect. It is about understanding the factors that influence our health and finding realistic, sustainable ways to make positive changes that work for us.

By understanding what influences cancer risk and focusing on the steps we can take, we can all make informed choices that support better health now and in the future.

I hope this toolkit provides the knowledge, confidence and encouragement to take those first steps – because every positive change is an investment in your future health.

Dr Mohsin Choudry
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RM Partners NHS Cancer Alliance

Did you know you can reduce your risk of developing cancer?

Around 4 in 10 cancers in the UK could be prevented by some simple and easy lifestyle changes.

Research has shown that things like stopping smoking, maintaining a healthy weight, staying safe in the sun, cutting down on alcohol and eating a healthy, balanced diet can reduce the risk of cancer.

Not all cancers are preventable but the biggest lifestyle changes you can make to reduce your risk are:

- Increasing your fibre intake
- Eating a balanced diet rich in fruit and vegetables
- Reducing your alcohol intake
- Staying physically active
- Stopping smoking or tobacco use

These changes do not have to happen all at once. **Every positive step counts, and even small, sustainable changes can have lasting health benefits.**

It's never too late to start making positive changes to improve your health in the future.

Diet and nutrition

Variety is key! Eating a healthy and balanced diet can reduce your risk of developing cancer.

A healthy diet means eating mostly:

- **fruit and vegetables**
- **wholegrains such as wholegrain rice, oats and wholemeal bread**
- **healthy protein sources like chicken, fish, pulses, eggs and low fat dairy**

And cutting down on:

- **processed and red meat**
- **alcohol**
- **foods that are high in fat, sugar and salt**

Eating a healthy, balanced diet can help you to maintain a healthy weight, which can reduce your risk of cancer. Eating lots of sugary food and drinks, high calorie foods, and foods that are high in fat, can lead to being overweight or obese. Eating red or processed meat, for example bacon, may also increase the risk of bowel cancer, as it damages the cells of the bowel.

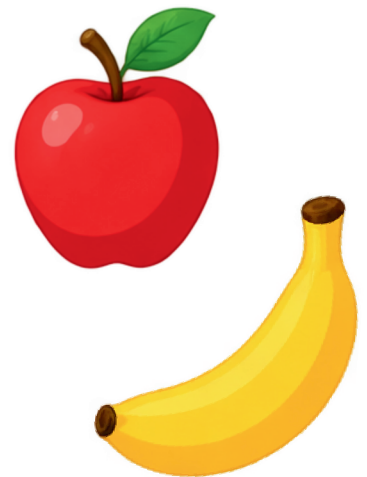
When it comes to cancer risk, your overall diet is more important than individual foods.

As part of a healthy, balanced diet eat more:

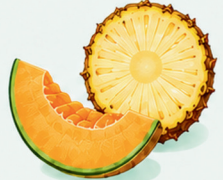
Fruit and vegetables: Eating a wide variety of fruit and vegetables is a great first step to eating well and lowering the risk of some cancers. Aim for *at least* five portions every day.

Remember, fresh, frozen or tinned, it all counts! Frozen and tinned fruit and vegetables are packed with vitamins and minerals and are a great way to enjoy them every day.

Frozen and tinned options are nutritious, affordable, have a long shelf life, and are an easy way to add more nutrients to your meals while reducing food waste. Just be careful to choose options in water (with no added sugar or salt) or in natural fruit juice instead of syrup!



Here are some examples of **what counts as a 5 a day portion for an adult**. One portion of fruit and vegetables weighs 80g, roughly equivalent to:

1 Cruciferous vegetables 8 small florets or pieces e.g. broccoli, cauliflower, brussels sprouts 	2 Root vegetables 1 whole e.g. carrot, parsnip, sweet potato 	3 Salad leaves 1 cereal bowl e.g. lettuce, uncooked spinach 
4 Medium to large vegetables ½–1 whole vegetable e.g. courgette, leek, pepper, tomato 	5 Small or sliced vegetables 3 heaped tablespoons e.g. peas, sweetcorn, sliced cabbage, mushrooms, runner beans 	6 Large fruit 1–2 slices e.g. mango, melon, pineapple 
7 Medium fruit 1 whole e.g. apple, banana, orange, peach, pear 	8 Small fruit 2 whole e.g. kiwi fruits, plums, satsumas 	9 Berries and grapes 1–2 handfuls e.g. blueberries, raspberries, grapes 
10 Unsweetened fruit or vegetable juice 150ml or one glass (only counts as one of your 5 A DAY) e.g. orange juice, apple juice 	11 Cooked pulses (beans & lentils) 3 heaped tablespoons (only counts as one of your 5 A DAY) e.g. canned chickpeas, lentils 	12 Dried fruit 1 heaped tablespoon (30g) (only counts as one of your 5 A DAY) e.g. raisins, dried cranberries 

 **Aim for at least 5 portions of a variety of fruit and vegetables every day.**

Dairy: Dairy products, like milk, cheese and yoghurt, can be part of a healthy, balanced diet. Dairy food can provide us with many important nutrients, such as protein, calcium, vitamin B12 and iodine.

However, full-fat milk, butter, ghee and hard cheese can be high in calories and saturated fat (a type of fat we should eat less of), so it's better to eat these only occasionally and in smaller amounts.

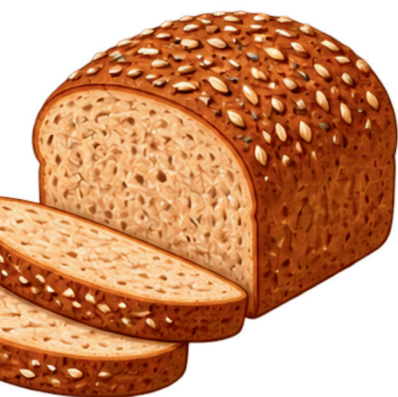
Instead, choose reduced or low-fat versions of dairy:

- skimmed or semi-skimmed milk
- reduced-fat cheese
- low-fat yoghurt



High-fibre foods: A diet high in fibre, including plenty of wholegrains, can help reduce the risk of bowel cancer. Wholegrains are foods like wholewheat pasta, oats and wholemeal bread. All wholegrains are high in fibre.

Foods that are high in fibre help you poo more often and keep the gut healthy. This reduces cell damage in the bowel, which means bowel cancer is less likely.



How do I know if a food is wholegrain?

Wholegrain foods are often brown, but not always. Check the name for words like “wholemeal”, “wholewheat” or “wholegrain”. Common wholegrain foods you can find in the supermarket include:

- Wholemeal (brown) bread, wraps, pittas and chapattis
- Wholegrain breakfast cereals such as wheat biscuits or bran flakes
- Wholewheat (brown) pasta and noodles
- Wholemeal flour
- Brown and wild rice
- Quinoa, barley, bulgur and spelt
- Rye bread and crackers
- Oats (including porridge) and oatcakes



What is fibre?

Fibre is a type of carbohydrate that can't be fully digested in your gut.

It is found naturally in plant-based foods such as vegetables, fruit, wholegrains (like wholewheat pasta), pulses (beans, peas and lentils), and unsalted nuts and seeds.

Diets higher in fibre are generally healthier as they include more plant-based foods. These types of food also provide a range of different vitamins and minerals. Remember to start *low and slow* when you begin to increase your fibre intake to help your body adjust!

Adults should aim to eat at least 30g of fibre a day.



How much fibre should I have?



Adults are recommended to get around **30g** of dietary fibre each day for the general health benefits.

What are you looking for on a nutrition label?



HIGH FIBRE

6g
per 100g



SOURCE OF FIBRE

3g or more
per 100g

Some of the best fibre-rich food choices are:



CEREALS & CARBOHYDRATES



Shredded whole wheat or bran cereals **13-24.5g**



Wholemeal bread (two slices) **7.0g**



Wholemeal spaghetti (boiled) **4.2g**



FRUIT & VEGETABLES



Figs **6.9g**



Strawberries **3.8g**



Parsnip (boiled) **4.7g**



Broccoli (boiled) **2.8g**



NUTS & SEEDS



Almonds **7.4g**



Peanuts **7.6g**



Sesame seeds **7.9g**



Sunflower seeds **6.0g**



PEAS & BEANS



Peas (boiled) **5.6g**



Baked beans (in tomato sauce) **4.9g**



Green beans (boiled) **4.1g**



Fibre-rich foods can help you reach your daily fibre target.



How much should I eat?

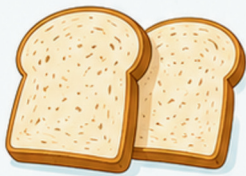
Choosing healthy portion sizes from the food groups below can help you get the right balance of nutrients. It also supports a healthy weight, which lowers the risk of many common cancers. Below are examples of what a **healthy portion looks like for an average adult**.

STARCHY FOODS

Eat 3 to 4 portions daily. Choose wholegrain or high fibre versions with less added fat, salt and sugar.

Bread

2 medium slices



Rice

75g or two handfuls (dried weight)



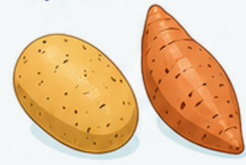
Egg noodles

65g or one nest (dried weight)



Baked potatoes

220g or about the size of your fist



Plain naan bread

70g or half a plain naan



Pasta

75g or two handfuls (dried weight)



Breakfast cereal

40g or about three handfuls



Yam

180g or about 4 tablespoons (boiled weight)



PROTEIN FOODS: PULSES, SOYA, TOFU, FISH, EGGS, MEAT

Eat 2 to 3 portions daily. Eat more beans and pulses, and try to eat fish twice a week.

Choose lean meats such as skinless chicken and limit red meat to no more than three portions weekly.

Avoid processed meat altogether (eg ham).

Pulses (beans, chickpeas and lentils)

120g or about 6 tablespoons



Soya, tofu and meat alternatives

80–100g or portion size as instructed



Eggs

2 medium



Fish white and oily

140g or about the size of your palm (cooked weight)



Meat

90g or about the size of a deck of cards (cooked weight)



DAIRY AND FORTIFIED DAIRY ALTERNATIVES

Eat 2 to 3 portions daily. Choose lower fat and lower sugar options.

Milk and alternatives

200ml or 1 glass



Cheese

30g or about the size of two thumbs



Yoghurt

125g or 1 standard pot



UNSATURATED OILS AND SPREADS

These are healthier fats and include olive, rapeseed and other vegetable oils and spreads.

As all types of fat are high in calories, use in small amounts.



EAT LESS OFTEN AND IN SMALL AMOUNTS

Foods high in fat, sugar and salt



TOP TIPS

- ✓ Base your meals on starchy foods, lots of fruit and vegetables, and some protein foods.
- ✓ Choose wholegrain or higher fibre options.
- ✓ Drink plenty of water.



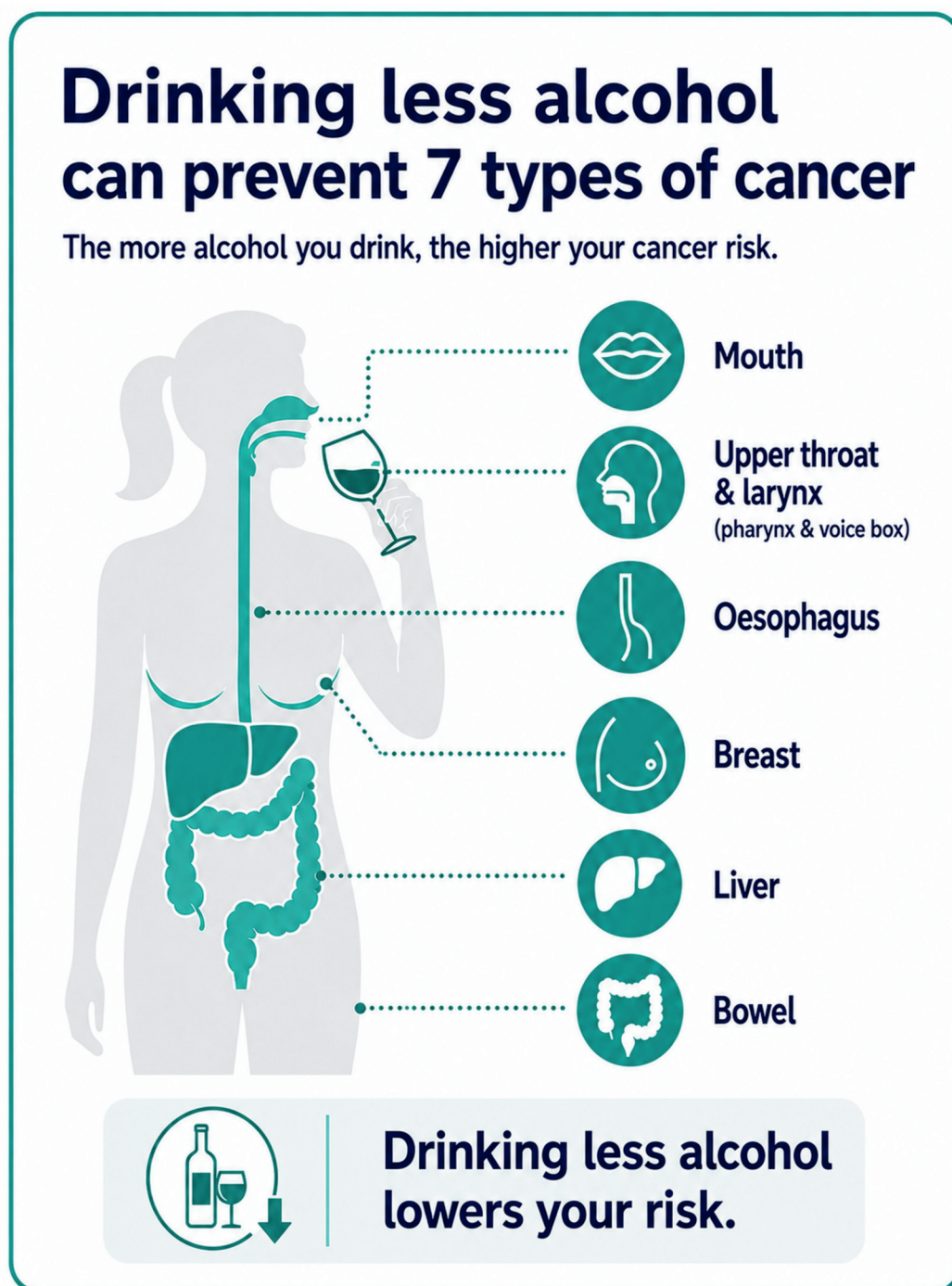
Water is the best choice to stay hydrated.



Alcohol

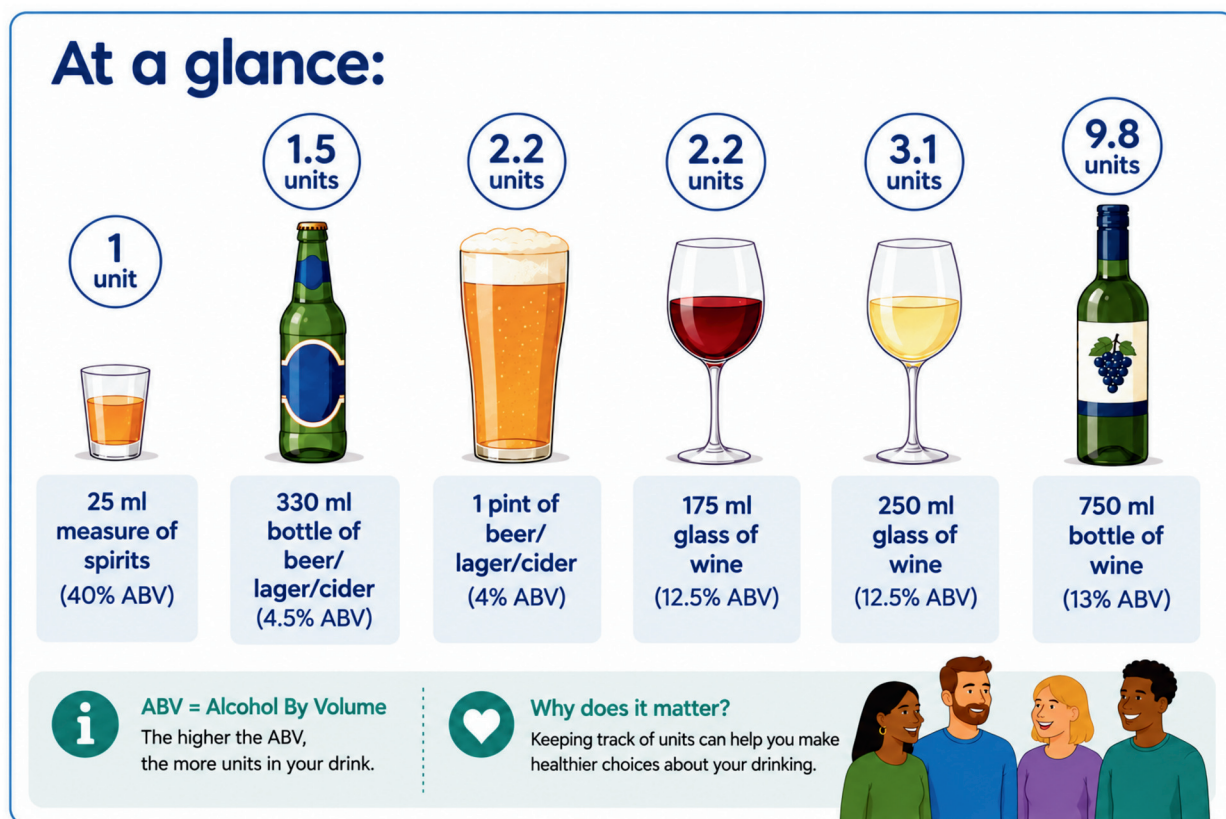
Drinking alcohol is known to cause 7 types of cancer. Drinking alcohol doesn't mean that you'll definitely get cancer, but the risk is higher the more alcohol you drink.

People might talk about some alcoholic drinks being better or worse for you than others but all types of alcohol increase the risk of cancer — as it's the alcohol itself that causes damage, even in small amounts.



The more you can cut down on alcohol the more you can reduce your risk of cancer. Drinking less alcohol has lots of other health benefits too - you can reduce your risk of high blood pressure and liver disease by cutting back.

To keep health risks from alcohol to a low level (if you drink) it is safest **not to drink more than 14 units a week on a regular basis**. If you regularly drink as much as 14 units per week, it is best to **spread your drinking evenly over 3 or more days**. If you wish to cut down the amount you drink, a good way to help achieve this is to **have several drink-free days each week**.



Did you know?

- **Alcohol is typically detectable in blood, saliva, and breath within 15-60 minutes.** Whilst it varies from person to person, **it takes roughly one hour to process one unit of alcohol**. However, the more you drink, the slower the body becomes at processing alcohol.
- **Drinking alcohol is worse for you if you also smoke.** When used together they increase the risk of cancer even more. This is because tobacco and alcohol have a combined effect that causes greater damage to our cells. People who smoke and drink alcohol are at a **higher risk of mouth and upper throat cancers**. Alcohol may cause changes to cells in the mouth and throat that make it easier to absorb the cancer-causing chemicals in tobacco smoke. Alcohol may also **change how the toxic chemicals in tobacco smoke are broken down in the body, making them even more harmful**.
- **Around 17,000 new cancer cases in the UK were attributed to drinking alcohol in 2020.**

Physical activity

Exercise and physical activity helps us to maintain a healthy weight. Keeping a healthy weight cuts your risk of cancer and other serious diseases.

Being physically active means any movement that uses your muscles and more energy than when you're resting. Being physically active doesn't have to mean joining a gym or an exercise class. It also includes everyday activity, like walking to the shops, walking up the stairs and light housework or gardening.

Physical activity can include:

- **moderate intensity** – this is when the activity makes you feel warmer and breathe faster, *but you can still talk*. This could include activities like brisk walking, cycling or swimming.
- **vigorous intensity** – this is an activity that raises your heart rate and makes you start to sweat and feel out of breath. This could include activities like running, aerobics or football.

Adults should aim to:

- do at least **150 minutes of moderate intensity activity a week or 75 minutes of vigorous intensity activity a week**
- **do strengthening activities that work all the major muscle groups** (legs, hips, back, abdomen, chest, shoulders and arms) on at least 2 days a week
- **spread exercise evenly over a week**
- **reduce time spent sitting or lying down** and break up long periods of not moving with some activity



“The remarkable physical and mental health benefits of activity are available to all of us.”

***Physical activity guidelines: UK Chief Medical Officers,
DHSC, updated July 2026***

Physical activity for adults

Any level of activity is linked to health benefits



Improves sleep



Manages stress



Maintains healthy weight



Improves quality of life

Reduces your chance of

-40% Type 2 diabetes

-35% Cardiovascular disease

-30% Falls, depression etc.

-20% Joint and back pain

-20% Cancers (bowel and breast)

Be active every day

Make a start today:
It's never too late



Any activity
is better than
none, and more
is better still

Every minute
counts



Aim for

at least

150
minutes
per week

OR

at least

75
minutes
per week

Moderate
intensity

increased breathing
able to talk

Vigorous
intensity

breathing fast
difficulty talking

or a combination of both

To keep muscles,
bones and joints strong



**Build
strength**



on at
least

2

days a
week

For older adults
Improve balance

2 days a week to reduce the
chance of frailty and falls



Minimise sedentary time

Break up periods
of inactivity



Every move counts. Better health. Better life.
Start today and make activity a part of your day.

What's the science behind physical activity and cancer?

Scientists are still investigating how physical activity reduces cancer risk, but studies show that regular activity can:

- Help maintain healthy hormone levels.
- Improve insulin sensitivity, meaning your body uses insulin more effectively to regulate your blood sugar.
- Reduce inflammation in the body.

There is also strong scientific evidence that physical activity lowers your risk of developing bowel cancer. This may be because physical activity helps you maintain a healthy weight and helps food move through the digestive system more quickly.

Overweight and obesity

Being overweight doesn't mean that you'll definitely develop cancer, **but the risk is higher the more overweight you are and the longer you are overweight for.** If you are overweight, losing weight will help reduce your risk of cancer.

There are lots of benefits to keeping a healthy weight. These include having increased energy, and less risk of conditions such as heart disease, stroke and joint pain.

Aim to be active every day!

Did you know?

- Obesity or being overweight is the **second biggest cause of cancer in the UK** and linked to more than **1 in 20 cancer cases.**
- Keeping to a **healthy weight reduces your risk of developing at least 13 different types of cancer.**

Tobacco cessation

Every time you use tobacco, your body is exposed to thousands of chemicals, many of which are poisonous. Smoking includes all types of tobacco, for example cigarettes and shisha.

Successfully stopping smoking or using tobacco is one of the key ways in which you can help to improve your overall health, not just from cancer, but many other medical problems.

The day you stop, your body starts clearing itself of toxins and the repair process begins. The earlier you quit, the more you're likely to benefit. But it's never too late – because quitting will improve your health whatever your age and no matter how long you have used tobacco.

Paan, bidi and shisha: Tobacco that you do not smoke, including paan, betel quid and chewing tobacco, is not a 'safe' way to use tobacco and can be as addictive as smoking.

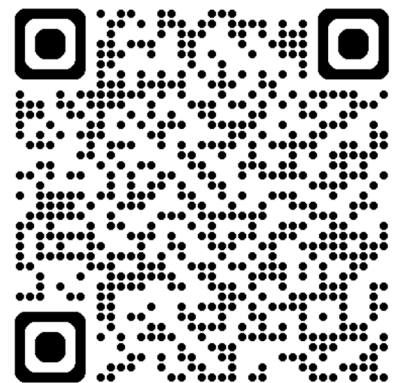
Research has shown that using smokeless tobacco raises the risk of mouth cancer and oesophageal (food pipe) cancer.

Stop Smoking London

There isn't a one-size-fits-all way to quit. You can choose options that work best for you, and that's where Stop Smoking London can help.

They can direct you to free local services, which may include Nicotine Replacement Therapy (NRT), and provide guidance and support that will boost your chances of quitting.

Find out more at: [Stop Smoking London - We're Here to Help You Quit Smoking](#)



What happens when you quit smoking?



The sooner you quit, the sooner you'll notice changes to your body and health. Look at what happens when you quit for good.

1 After 20 minutes



Pulse and blood pressure begin returning to normal.



2 After 8 hours



Carbon monoxide levels fall and oxygen levels recover.



3 After 48 hours



Carbon monoxide is gone. Taste and smell improve.



4 After 72 hours



Breathing becomes easier because your bronchial tubes have started to relax. Energy increases.



5 After 2 to 12 weeks



Circulation improves so blood pumps to your heart and muscles more efficiently.



6 After 3 to 9 months



Coughs, wheezing and breathing problems improve as lung function increases by up to 10%.



7 After 1 year



Your risk of heart attack is around half that of a smoker.



8 After 10 years



Your risk of death from lung cancer is around half that of a smoker.



Stopping smoking is one of the best things you can do for your health.

Every smoke-free day helps your body recover.



You've got this. A healthier, smoke-free life starts today.

Additional Resources

- **NHS Healthy Choices Quiz:** <https://www.nhs.uk/better-health/healthy-choices-quiz/>
- **NHS Better Health:** <https://www.nhs.uk/better-health/>
- **NHS Healthier Food Swaps:** <https://www.nhs.uk/healthier-families/food-facts/healthier-food-swaps/>
- **The Eatwell Guide:** <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well/food-guidelines-and-food-labels/the-eatwell-guide/>
- **NHS Alcohol Advice:** <https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/alcohol-advice/alcohol-support/>
- **UK Chief Medical Officers' Low Risk Drinking Guidelines:**
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a80b7ed40f0b623026951db/UK_CM_Os_report.pdf
- **UK Chief Medical Officers' Physical Activity Guidelines:**
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/physical-activity-guidelines-uk-chief-medical-officers-report/uk-chief-medical-officers-physical-activity-guidelines>
- **Stop Smoking London:** <https://stopsmokinglondon.com/>
- **World Cancer Research Fund:** <https://www.wcrf.org/>

The NHS Health Check: The NHS Health Check is a free check up of the health of your heart and blood vessels (cardiovascular health). If you are aged 40-74, and do not have a pre-existing health condition, you should be invited to an NHS Health Check by your GP or local council every 5 years.

The check takes about 20-30 minutes, when a health professional will carry out some simple tests, such as blood pressure, and ask you some questions about your health.

You will be given your cardiovascular risk score and can discuss ways to lower your risk if needed. **The risk factors are the same as for preventable cancers and can help reduce your chances of getting this too.** You can also be referred to local services who can support you.

Our Recommendations



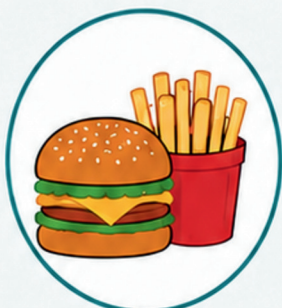
1. Be a healthy weight



2. Be physically active



3. Eat wholegrains, vegetables, fruit and beans



4. Limit 'fast foods'



5. Limit red and processed meat



6. Limit sugar sweetened drinks



7. Limit alcohol consumption



8. Stop smoking and tobacco use



9. Stay safe in the sun



Better choices. Healthier lives. Fewer cancers.

This community toolkit has been produced by RM Partners
NHS Cancer Alliance. Information has been sourced from:

- NHS England and GOV.uk
- World Cancer Research Fund
- Cancer Research UK

