

**BE CANCER  
AWARE**



**GET CHECKED  
EARLY**

# Be Cancer Aware

**Spotting  
symptoms  
and  
reducing  
your risk**



**Public Health  
Agency**



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 the signs and symptoms of cancer
- make lifestyle changes to reduce your risk of cancer

Further information is available at [www.becancerawareni.info](http://www.becancerawareni.info)

### **Get checked early**

You should see your GP if you have any of the symptoms included in this booklet. 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 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 cancer aware, to know what signs and symptoms to look out for. 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.

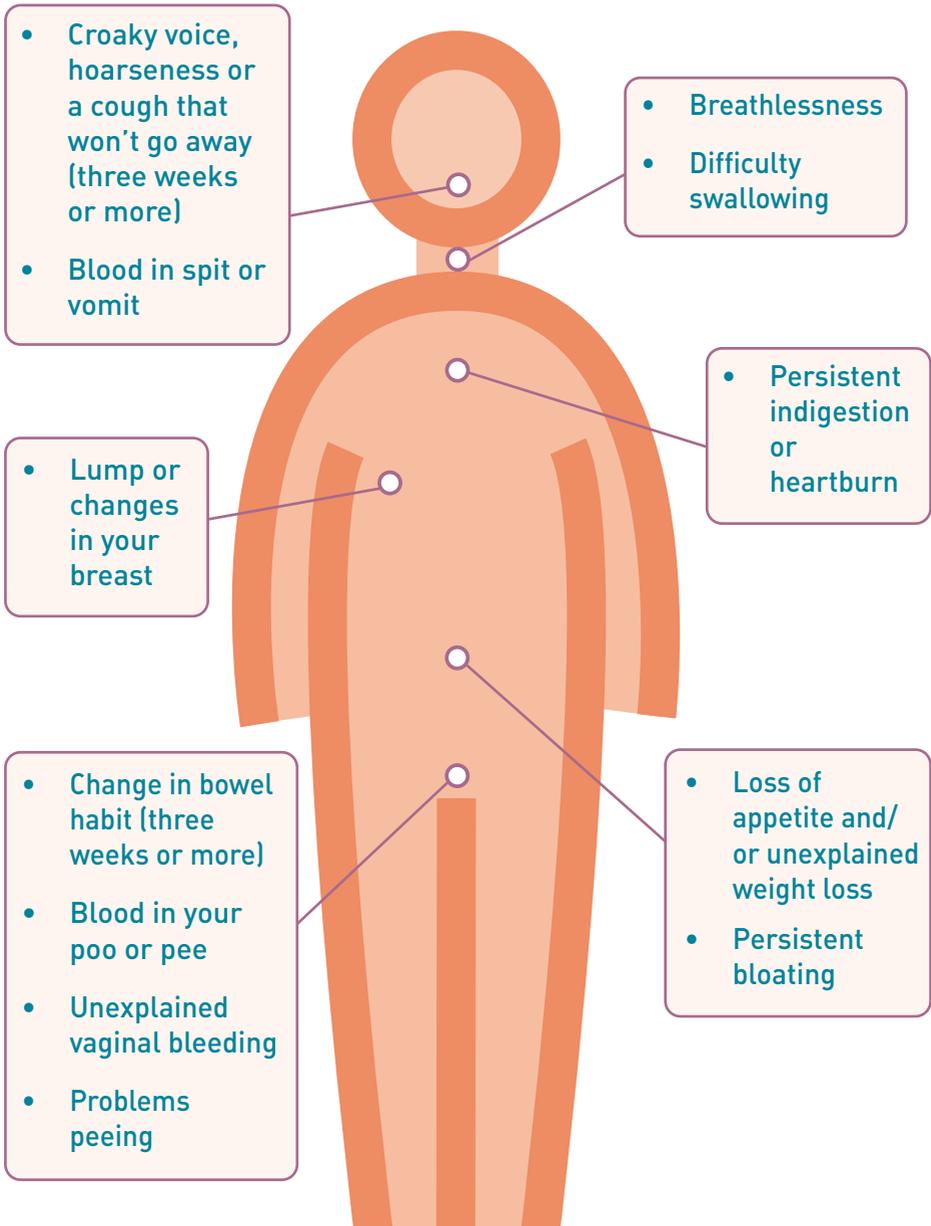
Don't let fear of what the doctor might find or feelings of embarrassment stop you from getting checked out. Spotting cancer early increases the chances of treating it successfully.

## General signs

Signs of cancer can also be more general, such as:

- A sore that won't heal
- A new mole or changes to a mole
- An unusual lump or swelling
- New, unexplained pain or ache
- Extreme tiredness
- Very heavy night sweats

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



# 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 changes to your lifestyle can significantly reduce your risk of developing cancer. Eating a healthy diet, taking regular exercise, reducing your alcohol intake, and stopping smoking will all help to lower your risk of cancer. It is also important to take care in the sun. Speak to your pharmacist for advice and further support.

## 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](http://www.careinthesun.org)

## 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.

Visit [www.choosetolivebetter.com](http://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.

## Alcohol

Alcohol can cause weight gain. It is also directly linked to certain types of cancer. To reduce your risk of alcohol-related health problems, including your risk of some cancers, you should reduce your alcohol intake and not drink more than 14 units of alcohol a week (men and women). If you do drink that much, it is best to spread it over three days or more, and to have several alcohol-free days each week. 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 - visit [www.drugsandalcoholni.info/alcohol-units](http://www.drugsandalcoholni.info/alcohol-units)

### 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.

## Smoking

Quitting smoking is one of the best things you can do to improve your health. Most lung cancer deaths are caused by smoking. It also causes leukaemia and other cancers, as well as lots of other serious illnesses.

The Public Health Agency's website 'Stop Smoking NI' offers a range of information and advice for those wanting to quit smoking, including information on local cessation services. You can also order your free 'Quit Kit' to give you the best chance of success in becoming smoke free. Visit [www.stopsmokingni.info](http://www.stopsmokingni.info)

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

## If you have health concerns, talk to your doctor

Making lifestyle changes can help reduce your risk of developing certain cancers. But it's important to be aware of general signs and symptoms of cancer. If you have any signs and symptoms you should talk to your GP as soon as possible.

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 see you. If you'd prefer to see a male or a female doctor, you can ask if one is available.

### Get checked early

The important thing is you contact your GP 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

Regular cancer screening is important. Screening can detect certain cancers before you have any symptoms. Finding cancers early means that treatment has a better chance of success. Cervical screening can even prevent cancer from developing.

The Public Health Agency runs screening programmes for breast, cervical and bowel cancers. To receive an invitation you must be registered with a GP in Northern Ireland.

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 women aged between 50 and 64 are invited every five years. If you are invited for screening, it's important to attend.

A home screening test kit is sent out for bowel cancer to people aged 60 to 74 years. If you receive a test kit, it's important you collect your sample and return it in the envelope provided.

Screening saves lives from cancer. For more information on cancer screening programmes visit **[www.pha.site/early-detection](http://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 as soon as possible. Early diagnosis of cancer means treatment is more likely to be successful.

For more information on cancer, visit **[www.becancerawareni.info](http://www.becancerawareni.info)**



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