

Cancer.

Prevention.

As we all know, cancer is common. In fact, 258,000 people a year are diagnosed with it in the UK.

Many cancers are, without doubt, preventable. In particular, the huge range of cancers triggered by cigarette smoking. But many are not and it is important to find cancers as early as possible. In general, a good long-term outlook depends upon early detection. Sadly, the UK statistics show that we lag far behind many of our European neighbours in our success rates and we should all be striving to remedy the situation.

Lung Cancer

This is the world's biggest cancer killer and we are still not much better at treating this successfully than we were 30 years ago. It is the most common cancer in men, the second commonest cancer in women and by far the biggest killer, wiping out 34,000 lives (a football stadium's worth) per year. A person with lung cancer in the UK has only about a 5% chance of surviving for 5 years. In America the chances are about 14%. The average survival time is 6 months from diagnosis.

Due to the fact that more and more women are smoking, more women are getting and dying from lung cancer now than breast cancer. The figures make grim reading and our advice is to avoid the single biggest cause - smoking in any form. A smoker has about 800% greater likelihood of lung cancer compared to a non-smoker. Even if your partner smokes and you don't, your risk increases by a measure of about 25%.

Bowel Cancer

This is the second biggest cancer killer and people are literally dying of embarrassment in the UK. About 34,000 cases are confirmed every year and it is the third commonest cancer in both women and men. Eighteen thousand people die from it a year and sadly, in many cases, it could have been successfully treated if found early.

Those at greatest risk of the condition (for example, those with a strong family history) will be advised to have regular, specific bowel screening. Also, all those over 45 are offered a special stool test to look for microscopic blood in the faeces. Bowel cancer is not the only cause of blood in the stool but a positive result would usually necessitate a more thorough test where the lining of the bowel is visualised.

A simple rectal examination can also pick up a large number of bowel cancers. Although not something to look forward to, it could literally save your life.

Research has indicated that as many as 35 in 100 cases could be prevented by altering our diet. This fact is astonishing and information which is largely completely ignored. There is consistently strong evidence that a high fibre diet (cereals, fruit and vegetables) significantly reduce the chances of bowel cancer. Eating at least five portions of fruit and vegetables every day is thought to protect against this and many different cancers through the benefits of the antioxidant vitamins and minerals they contain. Moderate amounts of exercise may also protect against bowel cancer.

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Prostate Cancer

This is the second commonest cancer in men (after lung cancer) and the fourth most common in the UK. The prostate is a male sex gland which produces a thick fluid that forms part of the semen. It is about the size of a walnut and is located below the bladder and in front of the rectum.

The causes of prostate cancer are not fully understood yet, but it appears to be associated with a high fat, high meat, low-vegetable diet. Men with a strong family history of prostate cancer are at greater risk of developing the disease. In its early stages, prostate cancer often doesn't cause symptoms, but when they do occur, they may include any of the following problems:

- Difficulty or delay in urinating
- Stopping and starting urinating
- A weak stream of urine
- Urinating more often than usual
- Pain while urinating
- Blood in the urine
- Pain or stiffness in the lower back, pelvis and hips.

A healthy, low-fat diet seems to help prevent this condition. Eat at least five portions of fruit and vegetables a day, including plenty of tomatoes, and reduce your consumption of red and processed meat. Drink alcohol in moderation, no more than three to four units a day. One unit is half a pint of ordinary strength beer or lager OR a glass of wine OR a pub measure of spirit.

Cervical Cancer

Fortunately, there has been a dramatic decline in the incidence of this cancer due to national screening programmes and now 4,000 women a year are diagnosed with about 1,300 women dying from the disease. This is still too many. Most cervical cancers can be avoided by detecting and treating precancerous cells early. These can be picked up during the cervical smear tests which are offered every 3-5 years on the National Health Service and at Nuffield Health Centres. A negative smear result puts you at low risk of having or developing a cervical cancer over the next 3 years.

Testicular Cancer

It's not known why testicular cancer occurs or why one man is more likely to get it than another.

It may be hereditary. If you have a close male relative with testicular cancer then you could be ten times more likely to develop it. Men who had an undescended or partly descended testicle are five times more likely to develop testicular cancer.

After a warm bath or shower look out for:

- Testicle swelling
- A pea-sized hard lump on the testicle
- A dull ache
- A sharp pain felt around the testicle or in the scrotum.

If something doesn't feel right - get it checked out - don't ignore it.

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Some research suggests that regular exercise may prevent testicular cancer from developing. Certainly if a boy with an undescended testicle has it corrected before the age of ten then his risk drops back down to the average risk a man has of developing testicular cancer which is about one in 450.

However, since little is known and understood about why testicular cancer develops, the emphasis focuses on being more aware and examining the testicles regularly. Then, if cancer does develop it can be detected and treated early on.

Ideally self-examination is done every month. First of all, get used to what your testicles feel like normally by getting to know them. If you're not sure what they're supposed to feel like then ask your doctor to show you. Self-examination is best done after a bath or shower when the scrotum is relaxed. It's no good examining them when you have an erection because the scrotal sac is too tight preventing you from feeling the testes properly.

Holding your scrotum in the palms of the hands, use your fingers and thumbs to examine the shape, size, consistency and smoothness of the testes. It's not unusual for one testicle to be larger than the other or for one to hang lower than the other.

Ovarian Cancer

In the early stages ovarian cancer usually does not cause symptoms. When symptoms do occur these are usually as a result of the cancer growing and causing pressure or pain. The symptoms may include; prolonged abdominal swelling; abdominal pain; poor appetite; weight loss; a need to pass water often; digestive problems, for example, indigestion, bloating, constipation; unusual bleeding from the vagina.

Ovarian cancer is the fourth most common cancer in women in the UK. There are around 6,900 new cases in the UK each year. Most occur in women who have gone through the menopause. Over 50 percent occur in women over the age of 65. Ovarian cancer can run in the family.

Women who have never been pregnant, or who take fertility drugs for a prolonged period without falling pregnant, and those who have had breast cancer are at increased risk of ovarian cancer. Other possible risk factors include a high-fat diet and the use of talcum powder in the genital area.

The risk of developing ovarian cancer may also be related to how many eggs the ovary releases. Each time an egg is released (ovulation) the surface of the ovary breaks open and the cells on the surface divide to repair the damage, increasing the chances of a tumour developing. So, having children and breast feeding may reduce the risk, as may taking the contraceptive pill (as it prevents ovulation).

In the future a screening test may become available to detect ovarian cancer. Treatment includes surgery, chemotherapy, and radiotherapy.

Emotional support for the individual and their family is very important.

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Breast Cancer

This is now the most common cancer in Britain and, just recently, overtook lung cancer with 39,000 cases a year. The incidence seems to be increasing in Western countries for reasons that are not altogether clear. There are now some 14,000 deaths a year but the good news is that doctors are getting better at detecting and treating it.

Every woman should be breast aware throughout her adult life. It's an important part of caring for your body. Being breast aware is about becoming familiar with your breasts and the changes they go through throughout your life. It means knowing how your breasts look and feel normally, so you notice any changes that might be unusual for you.

Get into the habit of looking at and feeling your breasts from time to time. There is no set way to do this. You can decide what you're comfortable with and when it's convenient for you. You don't have to look and feel at the same time.

You need to be aware of any changes that are new or different for you, such as:

- A change in size - one breast may become noticeably larger or lower
- A nipple that has become inverted (pulled in) or changed its position or shape
- A rash on or around the nipple
- Discharge from one or both nipples
- Puckering or dimpling of the skin
- A swelling under your armpit or around your collarbone (where the lymph nodes are)
- A lump or thickening in your breast that feels different from the rest of the breast tissue
- Constant pain in one part of your breast or armpit

Skin Cancers

Doctors divide these into two categories: Melanomas, which are the most dangerous and Non-melanomas.

Melanoma - All skin cancers can cause problems but melanomas are the most aggressive. Nearly all skin cancers are thought to be due to the effects of ultraviolet light exposure on our skin and melanomas are no exception. Although this only represents about 2% of all cancers, the important point is that it is easily cured if detected early. Having your skin checked could literally be a life saver.

Non-melanoma - These are still potentially dangerous and usually less aggressive and easier to treat. There are at least 40,000 non-melanoma skin cancers diagnosed each year in the UK, making it the most common type of cancer. They are often left out of national statistics because most are caught early enough to treat successfully.

The best way to prevent skin cancer is to avoid spending too much time in the sun. You can get too much sun while walking to the shops or when driving a car with the windows down. The time of day and where you are is important too. The intensity of UV radiation increases during the middle of the day, between April to September, as you get nearer the equator and at higher altitudes. To protect yourself and your children:

- Stick to the shade between 11am and 3pm
- Cover up with clothes, a wide brimmed hat and sunglasses
- Apply a high-factor sunscreen (minimum SPF15 and three stars) regularly
- Drink plenty of water to avoid overheating
- Avoid using sun lamps or sunbeds