



Healthy living and cancer

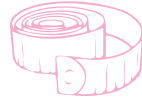
a woman's guide

Reduce
your risk of
cancer

Spot
cancer
early



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Dear Reader,

Women today often have very busy, demanding lives. Family, work and other commitments can mean that you leave little time for yourself. The Irish Cancer Society is here to remind you that it's important to look after yourself and make time for your health. To help, we've put together all you need to know to reduce your risk of cancer and spot the early warning signs.



We sometimes hear people saying 'cancer is all in the genes' or that there's not much you can do to prevent it. But genes are only a small part of the story. Did you know that only about 1 in 10 breast cancers are linked to genetic factors?

Nearly half of all cancers are preventable. A few small steps can make all the difference.

And the best part? Our cancer-fighting tips can help you to lose weight and feel great – inside and out.

If you have any questions or worries, the Irish Cancer Society is here for you! Put your mind at ease by calling the Cancer Nurseline on Freephone 1800 200 700 and speaking to a cancer nurse in confidence.

You can also email cancernurseline@irishcancer.ie

Dr Ciara Kelly

PS: Be sure to share this guide with the important women in your life. To order more free copies, see www.cancer.ie/publications/order-form

Don't leave cancer to chance

4 in 10 cancer cases are preventable by getting healthier and avoiding risk factors...



Don't smoke

Cut out the cigarettes and cut your cancer risk.
See page 6



Be a healthy weight

Being a healthy weight could reduce your risk of 11 cancers! **See page 8**



Be active every day

Women of all ages, shapes and sizes benefit from being active. **See page 14**



Have a healthy diet

Make food choices that help you cut your cancer risk.
See page 10



Limit alcohol

The less you drink, the lower your cancer risk.
See page 16



Avoid too much sun

Skin cancer is the most common cancer in Ireland, but you can do a lot to prevent it. **See page 18**



Breastfeed your baby

Breastfeeding can reduce your risk of breast and ovarian cancers.



Get vaccinated

Ensure your daughter takes part in the vaccination programme for HPV. The HPV vaccine is a safe and effective way to reduce the risk of cervical cancer.

See page 25



Get screened

Take part in screening programmes for:

- Bowel cancer
- Breast cancer and
- Cervical cancer

See page 41

Other ways to reduce your cancer risk

Avoid second-hand smoke

Second-hand smoke increases the risk of cancer in non-smokers. Keep your home smoke-free.

Know about radon gas

Find out if radon levels are high in your area and what to do about them if they are. See **www.radon.ie**

Take care in the workplace

Workplace substances like asbestos and formaldehyde can increase your risk of certain cancers. Always follow health and safety instructions.



Test:

How healthy are you?

Take our test to find out if there are simple steps you could take to improve your health and reduce your risk of cancer. Tick the answers that most closely apply to you.

1) How often are you physically active?

- A** Once a week or less
- B** A few times a week
- C** Daily

2) How long are you physically active for in total each day?

- A** Less than 10 minutes
- B** 10–25 minutes
- C** 30 minutes or more

3) How many portions of fruits and vegetables do you eat a day?

- A** 2 or less
- B** 3–4
- C** 5 or more

4) How often do you eat red meat (beef, pork, lamb)?

- A** Every day
- B** 4–5 times a week
- C** 2–3 times a week or less

5) How many standard drinks of alcohol do you have each week?

- A** 8 or more
- B** 1–7
- C** None



6) Do you smoke?

- A** Yes
- B** Yes, but I am trying to give up
- C** No

7) Do you know your weight and your body mass index (BMI)?

- A** No
- B** Yes, I need to lose weight
- C** Yes, I am a healthy weight

8) Where on your body do you tend to carry your weight?

- A** Around the middle
- B** All over
- C** I don't tend to carry excess weight

9) When did you last have a check-up with your doctor?

- A** I have never had one
- B** Over two years ago
- C** In the last year

How did you score?

Mostly **As**

You could be leading a healthier lifestyle. Small changes could make a big difference to your health and your risk of getting cancer.

Mostly **Bs**

You're on the right road, but there's still room for improvement.

Mostly **Cs**

Well done, you seem to be taking lots of steps to reduce your cancer risk!

Smoking:

What you need to know

Smoking is a big risk factor for cancer, but it's a risk you can do something about.

Fast facts

- Almost all lung cancer is caused by smoking.
- More women in Ireland die from lung cancer than any other cancer.
- Smoking causes at least 11 other types of cancer that affect women.
- Smoking is the biggest cause of cancer and preventable death among women in Ireland.
- Quitting smoking doesn't just reduce your risk of cancer. It's the best thing you can do for your overall health.



The BEAUTY OF QUITTING



Quitting smoking improves your complexion as your skin becomes better nourished with oxygen and nutrients.

You can also expect to have brighter eyes, less wrinkles, stronger nails and shinier hair!



Question: Why is it illegal to smoke in cars with children?

Answer: Second-hand smoke is particularly harmful to children in enclosed spaces, such as cars.

Top tips for quitting smoking

Get ready to quit

Think about the reasons why you want to stop and what might make it hard. Pick a date when you're ready.

Get support

- Ask your family or friends to support you and not to smoke around you.
- Talk to your doctor for advice.
- Call the HSE Quit Team on Freephone **1800 201 203**, visit **www.quit.ie**, or freetext **QUIT** to **50100**

Prepare for cravings

Withdrawal symptoms will disappear within a few weeks. Change your routine to avoid times and places when you will have a strong urge to smoke.

Deal with cravings

Remember the **4 Ds**:

- **D**elay at least three minutes and the urge will pass.
- **D**rink a glass of water or fruit juice (sip slowly).
- **D**istract yourself – move away from the situation.
- **D**eep breath – breathe slowly and deeply – to help you to relax.

Take one day at a time

Every day without a cigarette is good news for your health, your family and your pocket.

Live well without smoking

Take more exercise and eat well to feel even better. And enjoy the extra money in your pocket.

“Smoking is expensive,
Quitting is priceless”

Body weight:

What you need to know

After quitting smoking, keeping a healthy weight is one of the best ways to reduce your chance of getting cancer.

Fast facts

- Getting to a healthy weight if you're overweight or obese could reduce your risk of 11 different cancers.
- High levels of certain hormones can increase the risk of cancer – fat cells in your body make hormones – so if you're overweight, you make more hormones.
- Extra fat stored around your waist puts you at greater risk.

Are you a healthy weight?

Body mass index (BMI)

BMI is a number that tells you if you are the right weight for your height. To find out your BMI, you need to know your weight and your height. Many pharmacies will have special scales that will measure it for you or you can use a website that will work it out for you.

Waist measurement

Measure with a tape just above your hipbone. As a woman, it's time to take action if your waist is more than 31.5 inches or 81 cm.

Top tips for being a healthy weight

Eat breakfast

Get your metabolism going by eating a balanced breakfast.

Portion caution

Don't overeat – learn about portion sizes.

Avoid liquid calories

Sugary fizzy drinks, fruit squashes and alcohol are all high in sugar and calories.

Drink lots of water

Drink at least 8 glasses a day.

Never shop when you're hungry

Make a list so that you're not tempted by unhealthy treats.

Eat slowly

Enjoy the taste of your food and eat at a table if possible.

Avoid high-calorie fatty and sugary foods

Go for low-fat and low-sugar options and pick healthy snacks like fruit.

Be realistic

Some weeks will be more difficult than others. The key is to keep going.

Most women can reach and stay within a healthy weight range by eating healthily, eating smaller amounts and becoming more active.

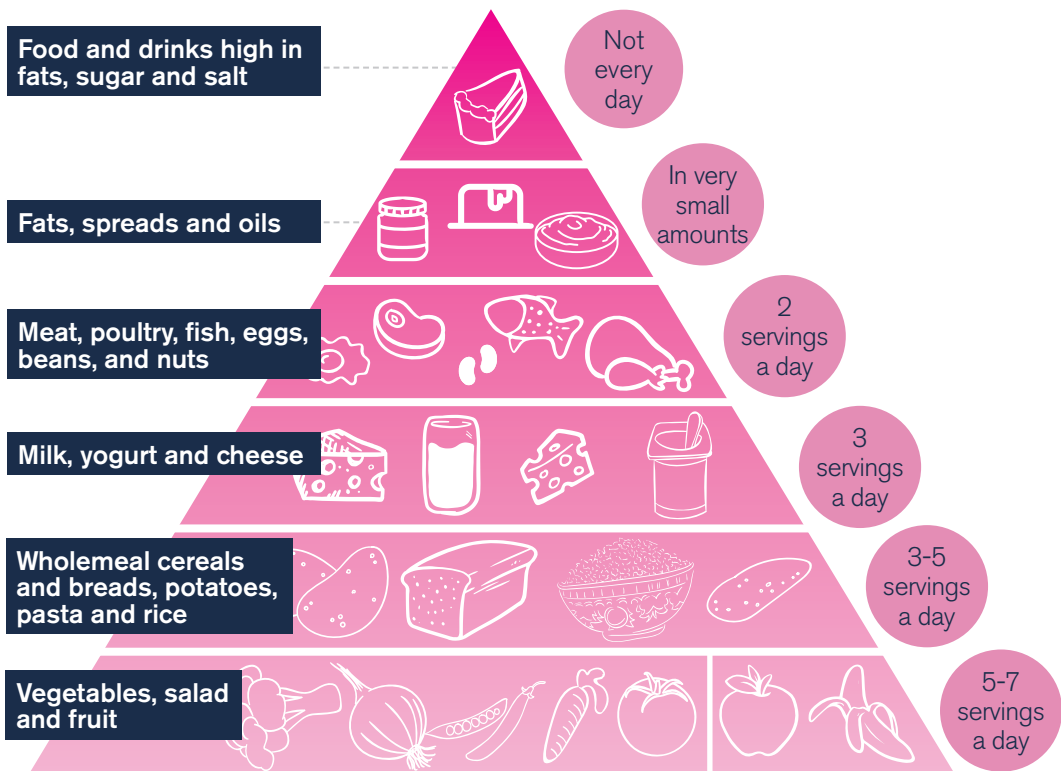
**“If you do the small things right,
big things happen!”**

Healthy eating: What you need to know

The type of foods you eat can help you reduce your cancer risk.

Fast facts

- You can make food choices that give you a greater chance of avoiding cancer.
- The food pyramid tells you what makes up a healthy balanced diet – use it to plan your healthy food choices every day.
- If you're a cancer survivor, healthy eating can reduce your risk of cancer coming back.



Did you know?

Claims on food packaging can be misleading. For example, a 'reduced-fat' food can be high in sugar. Looking carefully at food labels can help you to make better food choices.

✗ This is a lot

(per 100g food)

20g of fat or more

5g saturates or more

1.5g salt or more

0.6g sodium or more

10g sugars or more

✓ This is a little

(per 100g food)

3g fat or less

1g saturates or less

0.3g salt or less

0.3g sodium or less

2g sugars or less



?

Question: How many calories do you need every day?

Answer: It depends on your age and how active you are. The average woman aged 20–50 needs 1,800–2,000 calories every day. The average woman over 50 needs 1,600–1,800 calories every day.

Top tips for eating well



Fruit and vegetables

Eat **7 portions** of fruit, vegetables and salad every day. Have some fruit at breakfast, add salad to your sandwiches and have more vegetables with your dinner.



Fill up on fibre

Go for **high-fibre** foods like wholegrain bread, fruit and vegetables, beans, lentils, brown rice and oats.



Limit red and processed meat

- Do not eat more than 500g of cooked lean red meat in a week. This is roughly the same as 800g of raw meat.
- **Limit** or cut out processed meats like ham, rashers and salami.



Eat very little fat

- Avoid butter, oil, fatty meat and fried foods.
- Go for **lean meat** and low-fat options.
- Cook healthier by steaming, baking and grilling.



Avoid high-calorie foods

Cut down on fizzy drinks, fast food, sweets and cake.



Eat less salt

- Try to avoid pre-packed and processed meals. Go for **fresh ingredients** that you cook yourself.
- Check the labels for salt (sodium) content – even foods like cornflakes can have salt added.
- Avoid adding salt when cooking or when eating your food.

“ Make it a
lifestyle,
not a duty!,,



Active living: What you need to know

'Active living' means finding ways to be active in everything you do, every day.

Fast facts

- Getting active can help reduce your risk of bowel cancer, breast cancer, womb cancer and possibly lung cancer.
- Getting active will also make you fitter, more energetic and boost your mood.
- Activity doesn't just mean exercise – anything that makes you a bit warmer and slightly out of breath is good.
- Aim for at least 30 minutes a day, 5 or more days a week.

Did you know?

The more active you are, the better. If you can, try some more vigorous activity – the kind that leaves you out of breath and sweaty. Try running, jogging or even energetic dancing!

i
FACT

**Active parents have
active children!**

Top tips for being active every day



Start with what you can manage

If you're out of shape or unfit, start by walking or doing another gentle exercise.



Increase your level of activity as you get fitter

Set new goals to keep building your level of activity as you get fitter.



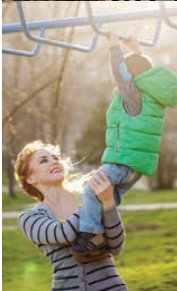
Stay safe

See your doctor for advice if you are very overweight or have medical problems.



Stand more, sit less

Avoid too much time sitting or lying down, for example, watching TV.



Be active in your everyday life

You don't have to join a gym.

- Walk or cycle instead of driving.
 - Take the stairs instead of the lift.
 - Play an active game with your kids.
 - Put more energy into work.
-



Get fit with friends or family

Having company can make exercise more fun. Plus, you can encourage each other if you're feeling lazy.

“ Think of it as a medicine you
need to take every day! ”

Alcohol:

What you need to know

Alcohol is a carcinogen – that means it can cause cancer.

Fast facts

- Alcohol is a risk factor for 8 types of cancer: breast, mouth, throat, voice box, oesophagus, bowel, liver and pancreas.
- It's not just women who have a 'drinking problem' who are affected.
- Even 1 drink a day can increase your risk of some cancers.
- There is no safe amount of alcohol. But the less you drink, the lower your risk.

Did you know?

As well as reducing your risk of cancer, there are many other benefits to cutting down. You will:

- Be better able to manage your weight
- Have healthier skin – alcohol dehydrates the skin
- Sleep better
- Have more energy
- Have more money
- Have better mental health
- Have a lower risk of stroke and heart disease



Question: Why should women drink less alcohol than men?

Answer: Women tend to have a higher percentage of body fat and less fluid in their bodies than men. This means that alcohol is less diluted in women's bodies. It takes less alcohol for us to feel the effects and alcohol stays in our bodies for longer.

Top tips for reducing alcohol risk

Drink less

Drink no more than **1 standard drink** a day if you are a woman, with 2 or 3 alcohol-free days.

Know how much you're drinking

Most people drink more than they think. Count your standard drinks for a week to find out. Remember, it's how much you drink that matters. All types of alcohol increase the risk of cancer, including red wine.

Measure your drinks at home

It's easy to pour a double or a treble measure of spirits without realising, and a big wine glass can hold 2 or 3 standard drinks.

Drink some non-alcoholic drinks

Try switching to non-alcoholic drinks as the evening goes on. Or have a few glasses of water in between.

Dilute your alcohol

Use more mixer in your drink or go for low-alcohol beer or wines.

Try to quit smoking

If you drink and smoke, your risk of cancer is even higher. See page 6 for tips on quitting smoking.

A standard drink is



Half a pint of stout,
larger, cider



A single pub measure
of spirits



A small glass
of wine

Sun and UV rays:

What you need to know

Skin cancer is the most common cancer in Ireland in women, but you can do a lot to prevent it.

Fast facts

- UV radiation from the sun's rays or sunbeds causes:
 - **Non-melanoma skin cancer** and
 - **Melanoma skin cancer**
- Non-melanoma skin cancer is the most common kind. Melanoma cancer is more serious but not as common.
- Skin cancer isn't just linked to sunburn. Even on cloudy Irish days up to 90% of the sun's UV rays can reach your skin.
- Be **SunSmart** every day, April to September, whatever the weather.
- Be extra careful if you take regular walks, garden regularly, play sports, work outside or generally spend a lot of time outside.

Did you know?

Sunbeds are banned for those under 18 years old. But this does not mean they're safe for others to use. Regular sunbed use by those under the age of 35 increases the risk of melanoma by 75%. Sunbeds also cause wrinkles, premature ageing and leathery skin.

Top tips for keeping safe in the sun

The SunSmart Code

- Stay in the shade, especially between 11 am and 3 pm.
- Cover up – wear a shirt with a collar and long shorts, dresses or skirts.
- Wear a hat that shades your face, neck and ears.
- Wear wraparound sunglasses to protect your eyes.
- Use sunscreen (SPF 30 or higher) with UVA protection – apply 20 minutes before going out in the sun and reapply every 2 hours.



What's your skin type?

- Do you tan easily or do you burn?
- Which celeb has your skin type?
- Knowing your skin type will help you to protect your skin from the sun.

Take our quiz at

www.cancer.ie/reduce-your-risk/sunsmart/skin-type-quiz



Question: What about vitamin D?

Answer: Spending a few minutes in the sun without sun protection is the best way for your body to make vitamin D. But never let your skin redden or burn. Most people should make enough vitamin D from 5 to 15 minutes of casual sun exposure a few times a week.

Women's cancers

In this section, we give you the most important information about cancers that affect women. These are known as gynaecological cancers and they begin in a woman's reproductive system.

The five gynaecological cancers are

1

Ovarian cancer

2

Cervical cancer

3

Vaginal cancer

4

Womb cancer
(also known as endometrial or uterine cancer)

5

Vulval cancer

Gynaecological cancers are sometimes discussed as a group but each gynaecological cancer is unique. Each one has different signs, symptoms and risk factors (things that may increase your chance of getting cancer).

Fallopian tube

Ovary

You have two ovaries. They are located in your lower abdomen, below your belly button. The ovaries make female hormones and produce eggs. When cancer starts in your ovaries or fallopian tube, it is called **ovarian cancer**.

Womb lining (endometrium)

Vagina

Your vagina links the bottom of your womb to the outside of your body. It is also called the birth canal. When cancer starts in your vagina, it is called **vaginal cancer**.

Neck of womb (cervix)

The cervix is at the top of your vagina and opens into your womb. It is also known as the neck of the womb. When cancer starts in your cervix, it is called **cervical cancer**.

Womb (uterus)

The womb is the pear-shaped organ in your lower abdomen. It is also called the uterus. Your womb is where the baby grows when you are pregnant. When cancer starts in your womb, it is called **womb cancer**.

Vulva

Your vulva is the outer part of your genital organs. It has two folds of skin called the labia. When cancer starts in your vulva, it is called **vulval cancer**.



If you don't understand something that has been written or you need more information, call our Cancer Nurseline on Freephone **1800 200 700** or email the nurses at **cancernurseline@irishcancer.ie**

What you need to know about ovarian cancer

All women are at risk of ovarian cancer, but it is rare in women under the age of 40. Most women who get ovarian cancer have gone through the menopause. Around 370 women in Ireland are diagnosed every year.

What are the signs of ovarian cancer?

The symptoms of ovarian cancer can be vague and quite mild:

- Pain in your abdomen or pelvis
- Bloating that does not go away
- Not being able to eat as much and feeling full more quickly
- Swollen abdomen
- Back pain
- Change in bowel or bladder habits, such as diarrhoea, constipation or wanting to pass urine very often
- Vaginal discharge, irregular periods or bleeding between periods
- Pain during sex



If you have any unusual vaginal bleeding, see your doctor straight away. If you have any of the other signs for two weeks or longer and they are not normal for you, see your doctor.

What increases my chance of ovarian cancer?

As with most cancers, your risk of ovarian cancer increases as you get older. You also have a higher chance of getting ovarian cancer if you:

- Have close family members (such as your mother, sister, aunt or grandmother) on either your mother's or father's side who have had ovarian cancer
- Have inherited the BRCA gene. This is a faulty gene that increases your risk of breast and ovarian cancers. For more information call our Cancer Nurseline on **1800 200 700**
- Have never been pregnant
- Are overweight or obese
- Have taken hormone replacement therapy (HRT) for 10 years or more
- Have a history of endometriosis

HRT and cancer

Women using HRT (hormone replacement therapy) are at an increased risk of ovarian, womb and breast cancers. If you're going through the menopause, it's a good idea to discuss the risks and benefits of taking HRT with your doctor. This will help you decide if HRT is right for you. If you do take HRT, ask to take the lowest effective dose needed to treat your symptoms for the shortest amount of time.

What you need to know about cervical cancer

Cervical cancer can happen at any age, but it is most common in women in their 40s and 50s. Each year, around 300 women in Ireland get cervical cancer.



What are the signs of cervical cancer?

Vaginal bleeding that is not normal for you. This might be:

- Bleeding after sex
- Bleeding in between your periods
- Bleeding after the menopause

Other symptoms are:

- A vaginal discharge that may smell unpleasant
- Pain or discomfort during sex or in your pelvis

What increases my chance of getting cervical cancer?

Human papilloma virus (HPV)

There is strong evidence that most cervical cancer cases are caused by a virus called human papilloma virus (HPV). Most women who have sex will have HPV at some point in their lives. HPV is spread through skin contact, often during sex. For most people, HPV infections come and go without any symptoms. But some women can have trouble getting rid of the virus, especially if they smoke. HPV infections can lead to changes in the cells of your cervix. Over time, these changes can turn into cancer.

Smoking

Smoking increases your chance of getting cervical cancer. When you smoke, chemicals that cause cancer travel to your cervix and can affect how it fights infection.

Other things that increase your chance of getting cervical cancer are:

- A family history of cervical cancer
- Taking the contraceptive pill for more than 5 years

How can I help lower my chance of getting cervical cancer?

You can significantly lower your chance of getting cervical cancer by:

- Having regular smear tests
- Getting vaccinated against the HPV virus
- Not smoking or quitting smoking

Regular smear tests

Cervical cancer is the only gynaecological cancer that can be prevented by having a regular smear test. A smear test can pick up changes to cervical cells when they are pre-cancerous. This means that if left untreated, they may become cancerous over time.

CervicalCheck is a free service that provides smear tests to women aged between 25 and 60 years. For more information, see page 41.

Getting vaccinated against HPV

The HPV vaccine is a safe and effective way to reduce your risk of getting cervical cancer. The vaccine is proven to work best when given to girls before they have been exposed to the virus. This means before their first sexual contact.

The vaccine is available free to all girls in first year of secondary school. Remember that if you are vaccinated against the HPV virus, you still need to have regular smear tests. The vaccine lowers your chance of getting cervical cancer, but you are still at risk.

“My cervical cancer story”

In November 2015, I found myself sitting in front of the consultant, my mother at my side. Two words came out of his mouth that you never want to hear: ‘It’s cancer’. I looked at my mother, her eyes filling with tears. My heart broke. Not for me, but for my family and my partner. They would have to go through this journey with me.

In the months before, I had been bleeding between periods. When I also started bleeding after sex, I knew I had to do something about it and went to my doctor.

Thankfully, after more tests and a very anxious wait, I learnt that the cancer hadn’t spread. I chose to have a radical trachelectomy for my treatment. This is when the cervix and nearby tissue are removed, but the womb is left in place. I hope to be able to have children someday.

There was very little pain during my recovery. Two weeks after the operation, I was told I was cancer free and I didn’t need chemotherapy or radiation. It was the most unbelievable relief. I still have check-ups every three months but I’m positive about the future and I’m getting on with my life.

“Cervical cancer is such a preventable disease.”

I encourage all women to go for free smear tests, which you can get from the age of 25. I’m also encouraging all parents to ensure that their daughter gets the HPV vaccine in first year in secondary school. It’s safe and prevents a lot of cancers. Any child I have will certainly get the vaccine.

Heather Keating,
26, cervical cancer survivor, Tipperary



What you need to know about womb cancer

Womb cancer (also called uterine cancer) is more common in women over the age of 50. All women are at risk, except those who have had an operation to remove the womb (hysterectomy). More than 400 women are diagnosed each year in Ireland.

What are signs of womb cancer?

Vaginal bleeding that is not normal for you. This might be:

- Bleeding after sex
- Bleeding in between your periods
- Bleeding after the menopause

Other symptoms include:

- Vaginal discharge that may smell unpleasant
- Persistent pain or pressure in your pelvis



What increases my chance of getting womb cancer?

As with most cancers, your risk of womb cancer increases as you get older. You also have a higher chance of getting womb cancer if you:

- Are overweight or obese
- Have never been pregnant
- Have taken hormone replacement therapy (HRT) for 10 years or more. For more information, see page 23
- Have a family history of womb cancer
- Have polycystic ovary syndrome

What you need to know about vaginal cancer

Vaginal cancer in Ireland is very rare. About 13 women are diagnosed with it each year. It is most common in women over the age of 60, but the number of cases in younger women is rising.

What are the signs of vaginal cancer?

- Unusual vaginal bleeding, often after sex
- Abnormal vaginal discharge
- Pain during sex
- An itch in the vagina that won't go away
- Frequency and discomfort when passing urine
- Pain in the back passage (rectum)
- A lump in the vagina



What increases my chance of getting vaginal cancer?

The cause of vaginal cancer is unknown, but it is more common if you:

- Have been exposed to HPV – for more information on HPV, see page 24
- Have a history of abnormal smear test results or you have had cervical cancer
- Are a smoker

What you need to know about vulval cancer

Vulval cancer is also very rare. About 50 women in Ireland are diagnosed with the disease every year. Vulval cancer is usually found in women over the age of 50, but the number of cases in younger women is rising.

What are the signs of vulval cancer?

- Severe itching, burning or bleeding on the vulva that does not go away
- Colour changes on the skin of the vulva, where it is redder or whiter than normal for you
- Sores, new lumps, a rash or warts on the vulva that do not go away
- Pain in your pelvis, especially when you pass urine or have sex



What increases my chance of getting vulval cancer?

The cause of vulval cancer is unknown, but it is more common if you:

- Have been exposed to HPV – for more information on HPV, see page 24
- Have a history of abnormal smear test results or have had cervical cancer
- Are a smoker
- Have chronic vulval itching or burning
- Have long-term vulval skin conditions that are also linked to vulval cancer

Symptom checker

Each gynaecological cancer has different symptoms. Often symptoms are easy to ignore or confuse with another condition. That is why it is important to take notice of your body and know what is normal for you.

Below is a summary chart of some of the signs and symptoms often linked to women's cancers. See your doctor immediately if you have bleeding that is not normal for you. For example, if it is heavier or unusual.

See your doctor if you have any of the other symptoms for two weeks or longer. It may be nothing to worry about, but find out for sure.

Symptom	Cervical cancer	Ovarian cancer	Womb cancer	Vaginal cancer	Vulval cancer
Unusual vaginal discharge	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Pain in your pelvis	✓	✓	✓		✓
Pain in your abdomen or lower back		✓	✓		
Bloating or swollen abdomen		✓			
Changes in bowel or bladder habits		✓		✓	
Itching or burning of the vulva					✓
Changes in vulva colour or skin, such as a rash or warts					✓
Unusual vaginal bleeding	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Discomfort or pain during sexual intercourse	✓		✓	✓	
Feeling full more quickly		✓			

What you need to know about breast cancer

Breast cancer is the most common cancer in women in Ireland, after non-melanoma skin cancer. Each year, around 2,900 women are diagnosed with the disease. Most women who get breast cancer are over 50, but you can get it at a younger age.

What are the signs of breast cancer?

- A change in the size or shape of one breast
- A change in the skin, like puckering, dimpling (like orange peel) or redness
- A change in the nipple shape or direction, like a pulled-in or flattened nipple
- An unusual discharge (liquid) from one or both of your nipples
- A change on or around the nipple, such as a rash or flaky or crusted skin
- Swelling in your armpit or around your collarbone
- A lump, any size, or thickening in your breast
- Constant pain in one part of your breast or armpit

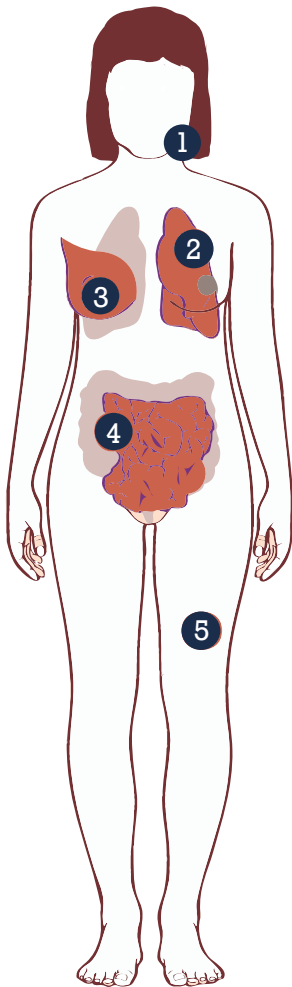


What increases my chance of getting breast cancer?

- Getting older
- Having a family history of breast cancer or ovarian cancer
- Taking hormone replacement therapy (HRT). For more information, see page 23
- Taking the contraceptive pill
- Having no children or having your first child later in life
- Previous breast disease
- Starting periods before the age of 12 or having menopause after the age of 55
- An unhealthy lifestyle such as being overweight, not being active or drinking alcohol

Other common cancers affecting women

Remember that gynaecological cancers and breast cancer are not the only cancers that affect women.



1

Mouth, head and neck cancers

170 women diagnosed every year

2

Lung cancer

1,000 women diagnosed every year

3

Breast cancer

2,900 women diagnosed every year

4

Bowel cancer

1,000 women diagnosed every year

5

Skin cancer

Non-melanoma skin cancer: **4,200**

Melanoma skin cancer: **500**
women diagnosed every year



To view or download any of our **What you should know** leaflets on common cancers affecting women, visit: www.cancer.ie/publications/reduce-your-risk

You can also call our Cancer Nurseline on **Freephone 1800 200 700** and ask for your free copy.

Spot cancer early

You are more likely to survive cancer if you spot it early. But do you know what to look out for?

Unexplained changes



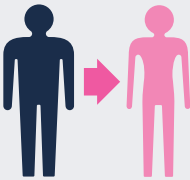
A lump or swelling

Make sure to check your whole body, not just your breasts.



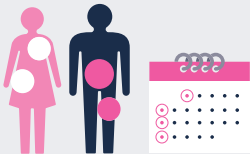
Bleeding that is not normal for you

Coughing up blood or noticing it in your pee or poo is not normal. Neither is bleeding from your vagina between periods, after sex or after the menopause.



Weight loss

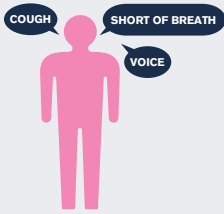
It is normal to see small weight changes over time. But a big weight loss, not related to dieting, may be a sign of something more serious.



Pain that does not go away

If you feel pain for more than four weeks that you cannot explain, talk to your doctor about it.

Persistent changes



A cough, changes in your voice or feeling short of breath

Speak to your doctor if you have any of these problems for more than three weeks, especially if you are a smoker or ex-smoker.



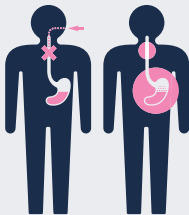
A sore that does not heal

If a spot, wart or sore does not heal in a few weeks, get it checked by your doctor, even if it is painless.



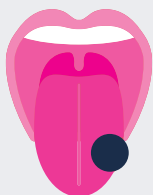
Bloating

If bloating does not go away within a few weeks talk to your doctor about it.



Difficulty swallowing, indigestion or heartburn

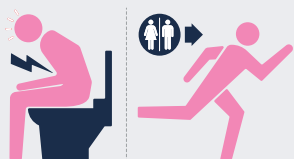
It is not normal to have indigestion or heartburn that happens a lot or is very painful. Difficulty swallowing is not normal either. Get it checked by your doctor.



Mouth or tongue ulcer

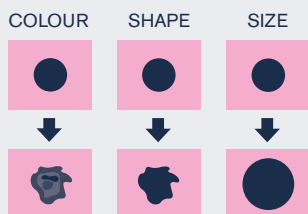
Having a mouth or tongue ulcer for three weeks or more is not normal and needs to be checked by your doctor or dentist.

Unusual changes



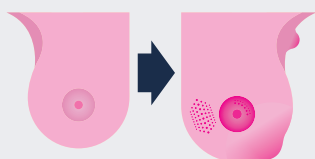
A change in your bowel or bladder habits

If you have constipation, diarrhoea or problems passing urine for more than a few weeks, talk to your doctor.



A new mole or change to an existing mole

Get into the habit of checking your skin every month for new moles. Also watch for changes in colour, shape and size of existing moles.



Any change in your breast

Get into the habit of looking at and feeling your breasts for changes in the shape, size, nipples and skin. Also watch for pain in one breast.

Worried? What can you do?

Don't ignore problems or warning signs

If you have any changes in your body that are unusual for you or you're worried, don't ignore it. Call your doctor and make an appointment, even if you feel OK. Most cancers can be successfully treated if they're caught early enough. Putting off going to the doctor could make cancer more difficult or even impossible to treat.

Often when women notice something different about themselves, they don't think much of it. Especially women approaching the menopause, because they expect their bodies to start behaving differently. But don't be tempted to put something unusual down to getting older before you see your doctor.

Don't worry

If you notice a change, the chances are it will not be cancer. But getting it checked is not wasting anyone's time. It could save your life.



Get the best from your visit to the doctor

Our top tips...



Be comfortable

Some symptoms are hard to talk about. For example, you might have blood in your poo or feel pain during sex. We promise your doctor has heard it all before, but if you don't feel comfortable talking to a male doctor, ask if you can see a female doctor.



Be prepared

Your doctor will probably ask a lot of questions, so think about:

- Your family history
- Your medical history
- Your lifestyle
- Your general physical and mental health
- Any medication you're taking

Think about any symptoms you have – when they started and how they feel. It can help to keep track of symptoms over a few days by writing everything down.

If you have noticed anything else unusual (even if you think it's not important) tell your doctor.



Speak out

Mention anything that's on your mind, even if the doctor doesn't ask. Be honest and give as much information as you can if the doctor asks you anything.



Ask questions

- Write a list of what you want to ask.
- Listen carefully and ask again if you don't understand.
- You can take someone along to your appointment to help you remember your questions or what the doctor says.



Don't be afraid to go to another doctor

- Trust your doctor, but it's OK to go to a different doctor if you're not happy with the answers you're getting.
- If you have something that's not normal for you, it's important that you get to the bottom of it.

Screening saves lives

What is screening?

Screening means testing for cancer when you have no symptoms. Screening is a great way to spot cancer early or find changes that might become cancer. We know that screening saves hundreds of women's lives every year.

There are three national cancer screening programmes in Ireland:

- **BreastCheck** and **CervicalCheck** are screening programmes for women
- **BowelScreen** is for women and men



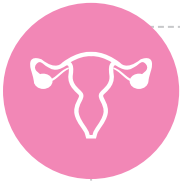


BreastCheck

BreastCheck invites women aged 50 to 69 for a free mammogram (breast X-ray) every two years.

Make sure you're on the register by:

- Contacting BreastCheck on Freefone 1800 45 45 55 or
- Checking online at **www.breastcheck.ie**



CervicalCheck

CervicalCheck provides free smear tests to women aged 25 to 60.

A smear test is a simple test that takes a couple of minutes.

To arrange your smear test, contact a registered smear taker of your choice and make an appointment. GPs, practice nurses and women's health centres all over Ireland are registered.

A full list is available at **www.cervicalcheck.ie** or by calling Freefone 1800 45 45 55.

CervicalCheck will send you a reminder letter when your next smear test is due.



BowelScreen

BowelScreen sends a free test kit to people aged 60 to 69 every two years.

You send back a sample of your faeces (poo) and this is tested for traces of blood – it's very quick and easy.

The test does not tell you if you have bowel cancer but it might tell you that you need more tests.

Call BowelScreen on Freephone 1800 45 45 55 to check you're on the register.

What does that word mean?

Abdomen	The part of your body that lies between your chest and hips.
Benign	Not cancer.
Biopsy	A test where a doctor removes a small amount of tissue to find out if cancer is present.
Cancer	A group of diseases in which cells in your body grow out of control. These abnormal cells can begin in one part of your body and spread to other body parts. There are many types of cancer.
Cell	The building blocks that make up your body. They are tiny and can only be seen under a microscope.
Chemotherapy	The use of drugs that kill or control cancer cells.
Diagnosis	Identifying a disease based on its signs and symptoms and medical testing.
Gene	A single unit of genetic information. It holds information to build cells and pass genetic traits from parent to child.
Human Papilloma Virus (HPV)	A very common virus that can cause changes to papilloma cells. It is passed on during sex or sexual contact.
Menopause	The time of life when a woman's periods stop.
Oncology	The study of cancer.
Pelvis	The area below your belly and in between your hipbones.
Radiotherapy	The use of X-rays to destroy cancer.
Risk factor	Anything that increases your chance of getting a disease.
Screening	Checking for disease in healthy people.
Symptoms	A change or feature that you notice in your body.

Useful organisations

More about cancer

For support, information and advice about anything cancer-related.

Irish Cancer Society Cancer Nurseline Freephone **1800 200 700**

Email **cancernurseline@irishcancer.ie**

Our website **www.cancer.ie**

You can also go to a Daffodil Centre.

See **www.cancer.ie/daffodilcentres** for more information.

More about giving up smoking

For help with quitting, call the HSE Quit Team

Phone **1800 201 203** | freetext **QUIT 50100**

Website **www.quit.ie**

More about getting active

For tips on how to get more active and information on clubs, groups and activities in your area.

Website **www.getirelandactive.ie**

More about healthy eating

For meal plans, recipes and more information on healthy eating and weight loss.

Website **safefood.eu**

More about alcohol

HSE Alcohol Helpline **1800 459 459**

Website **www.askaboutalcohol.ie**

More about breastfeeding

For support and advice on breastfeeding

Website **breastfeeding.ie**



Any questions?

Cancer Nurseline Freephone **1800 200 700**

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