

# OESOPHAGEAL CANCER

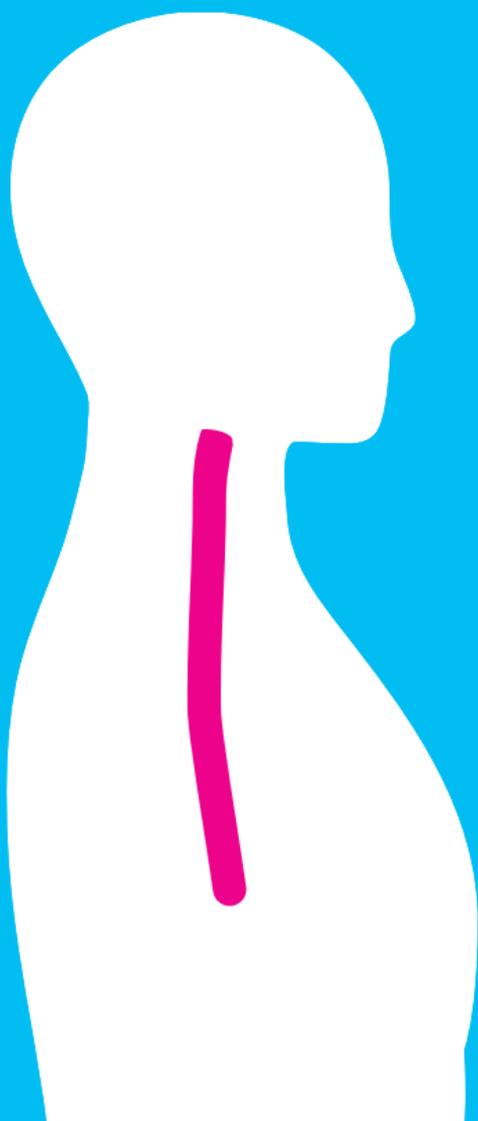
(FOOD PIPE OR GULLET)

How to spot the signs and symptoms  
and reduce your risk

[cruk.org](http://cruk.org)



CANCER  
RESEARCH  
UK



**The oesophagus is commonly known as the food pipe or gullet. There are over 8,300 cases of oesophageal cancer diagnosed in the UK each year. More than 8 out of 10 oesophageal cancers are diagnosed in people aged 60 and over.**

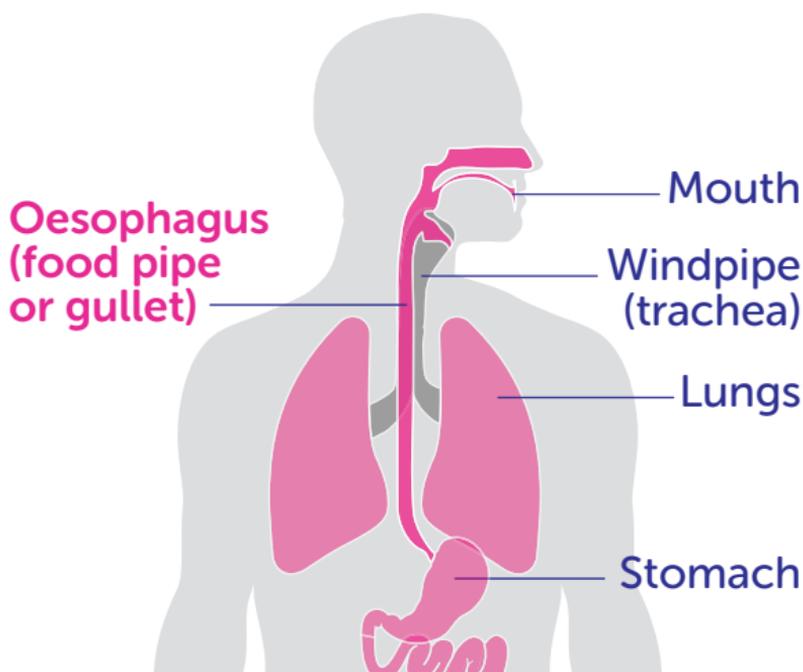
**Oesophageal cancer is more than twice as common in men than in women in the UK. Around 9 in 10 cases could be prevented through lifestyle changes.**

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**In this leaflet you can find out about:**

- the signs and symptoms to look out for
- how to reduce the risk of oesophageal cancer.

## What is the oesophagus?

It is part of the digestive system. It is the tube that carries food and liquids from your mouth to your stomach.



## What should you look out for?

It is a good idea to get to know what's normal for you, so that it's easier to spot any changes that are unusual or don't go away.

### Look out for:

- difficulty swallowing
- food coming back up
- heartburn or indigestion
- pain just below your ribs
- unexplained weight loss

Other warning signs might be blood in your vomit or repeated nausea or vomiting.

Some of these symptoms are very common and are more likely to be caused by things other than cancer. But it is important to see your doctor if you notice any of these changes.

## How can you reduce your risk?

Around 9 in 10 cases of oesophageal cancer can be prevented through lifestyle changes.



### Stop smoking or using tobacco

Smoking increases your chance of developing oesophageal cancer. Chewing tobacco or betel nut (areca nut, sometimes in paan or gutkha) can also increase the risk. The sooner you quit the better.



### Drink less alcohol

If you regularly drink alcohol, it's worth cutting down. The less you drink, the lower your risk of developing cancer.

**People who smoke and drink alcohol increase their risk of oesophageal cancer even further.**



### Keep a healthy weight

Carrying excess weight can increase your risk of developing oesophageal cancer. Try to maintain a healthy weight by being active and eating healthily.



### Eat your 5-a-day

Eating plenty of fruit and vegetables may help to reduce the risk of oesophageal cancer. Aim for at least 5 portions every day. Choosing a variety of different coloured fruit and vegetables will help you get a broad range of vitamins and minerals.

## What else affects your risk?

- **Age:** like most cancers, the risk of oesophageal cancer increases with age.
- **Chronic heartburn or acid reflux:** acid reflux (when stomach acid flows up the oesophagus) can cause pain known as heartburn. This can damage the lining of the oesophagus and increase the risk of cancer if it happens often for a long time. And it can cause a condition called Barrett's oesophagus which also increases cancer risk. Heartburn and acid reflux aren't usually serious but if you suffer from either, especially if it keeps happening, it is important to see your doctor.
- **Personal or family history:** your risk of oesophageal cancer may be higher if a parent has had it. Or if you have had some types of cancer before.

### Tips for reducing your risk through lifestyle changes

1. Use free Stop Smoking Services to give yourself the best chance of stopping smoking
2. Choose a few alcohol free nights a week to help cut down on the amount you drink
3. Try building physical activity into your daily life – walking to the shops or getting off the bus a few stops earlier are great ways to increase how active you are
4. Have some fruit with your breakfast to tick off one of your 5-a-day before you know it.

## Further information

You can find out more about cancer at [www.cruk.org/about-cancer](http://www.cruk.org/about-cancer)

Find out more about our health messages at [www.cruk.org/health](http://www.cruk.org/health)

For more about the signs and symptoms of cancer visit [www.spotcancerearly.com](http://www.spotcancerearly.com)

If you want to talk in confidence about cancer, call our information nurses on freephone **0808 800 4040**, Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm.

All our leaflets are thoroughly researched and based on the most up-to-date scientific evidence. They are reviewed by independent experts and updated regularly. You can order our full range of leaflets free online at [www.cruk.org/leaflets](http://www.cruk.org/leaflets)

## About Cancer Research UK

We pioneer life-saving research to bring forward the day when all cancers are cured. From our volunteers and supporters to our scientists, doctors and nurses, we're all here to save more lives and prevent, control and cure all cancers. Together we will beat cancer sooner. If you would like to support our work, please call **0300 123 1861** or visit our website [www.cruk.org](http://www.cruk.org)