A brief look at men’s cancers

Cancer Council 13 11 20
cancersa.org.au
In brief: men and cancer

One in two Australian men will develop cancer before the age of 85.

The most common cancers for men are prostate, bowel, melanoma and lung cancer. The good news is there are steps you can take to reduce your cancer risk or find cancer at a stage when treatment is more likely to succeed.

What is cancer?

Cancer is a disease of the body’s building blocks—the cells. Cancer occurs when cells begin to grow abnormally and out of control. These abnormal cells may grow into a lump called a tumour which can be benign (not cancer) or malignant (cancer). Some cancers remain in the body for years without symptoms while others may grow and spread rapidly.

Cut your cancer risk

One in three cancers can be prevented by living a healthy lifestyle. There are seven ways to cut your cancer risk:

1. be smoke-free
2. maintain a healthy weight
3. be SunSmart
4. eat a healthy diet with plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables, and limit processed meats
5. be physically active everyday
6. limit alcohol
7. check for unusual changes and have regular, appropriate screening tests.
Prostate cancer

The prostate is a small gland that sits just below the bladder and surrounds part of the urethra (the tube urine flows through). The prostate produces some of the fluid that makes up semen.

Prostate cancer is when cells within the prostate grow and divide abnormally leading to a cancerous tumour in the prostate. Prostate cancer can either be slow-growing and unlikely to affect quality of life, or it can be fast-growing and life-threatening.

General prostate problems

It is very common for men over 50 to experience one or more of the following:

- a need to urinate more often
- a frequent, urgent need to urinate
- difficulty starting
- a slow or stop-start stream
- leaking or dribbling after urinating.

In most cases these symptoms are caused by a non-cancerous, enlarged prostate—a common problem in men as they age. An enlarged prostate does not lead to prostate cancer however you should speak to your doctor if you have any of these symptoms.

Am I at risk?

Prostate cancer is the most common cancer in men. It mainly affects men over the age of 60 and is very rare in men younger than 45.

As well as getting older, having a father or brother who has had prostate cancer increases your risk, particularly if it was diagnosed before the age of 60. It is therefore important to let your doctor know if you have a close family history of prostate cancer so they can help you make a decision about whether prostate cancer testing is right for you.

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Low-down on prostate cancer testing

As testing for prostate cancer is not straightforward, and because there are risks associated with testing and treatment, deciding what to do can be confusing. The best approach is to have an open discussion with your doctor so you can make an informed decision about whether testing is right for you based on your age and family history.

Testing usually starts with a blood test to measure levels of prostate-specific antigens in the blood (PSA test).

This test will not confirm if cancer is present but the results can indicate if further investigation, such as a biopsy, might be necessary.

Research is currently focused on finding a test that can identify which prostate cancers require treatment and those which are unlikely to cause harm.

Questions for your doctor

- What is prostate cancer and what tests are available?
- What is my risk of prostate cancer?
- What are the pros and cons of early detection?
- Before I make my decision about PSA testing what else should I know?
Bowel cancer usually starts in the lining of the large bowel (colon or rectum). It can grow there for a long time before spreading to other parts of the body. It starts from tiny growths in the bowel wall called polyps. Only some polyps will grow into cancer. Bowel cancer kills over 76 Australians every week and affects both men and women. However if caught early enough, nearly all cases can be cured.

**Bowel cancer warning signs**

Bowel cancer often develops without symptoms. However when symptoms do occur they might include:

- bleeding from the back passage or any sign of blood after a bowel motion
- ongoing changes in bowel habits, for example, loose or more frequent bowel motions or increased constipation
- feeling your bowel does not empty completely
- abdominal pain
- loss of weight for no obvious reason
- unexplained tiredness, weakness or breathlessness.

It is important to see your doctor immediately if you notice any of the above-mentioned symptoms.

**Am I at risk?**

Your risk of bowel cancer is greater if you:

- are aged 50 years or over
- have a strong family history of bowel cancer
- have had serious inflammatory bowel disease (ulcerative colitis or Crohn’s disease) for more than eight years
- have inherited a particular genetic disorder
- have a poor diet and do not exercise
- smoke
- are overweight.

**Bottom line on beating bowel cancer**

If you are 50 years or over Cancer Council recommends a simple screening test every two years. Regular screening is important because you can have bowel cancer without any noticeable symptoms.

The test, called a Faecal Occult Blood Test (FOBT) is completed in the privacy of your own home. An FOBT looks for traces of blood in the bowel motion which are invisible to the naked eye. If blood is found, further testing, usually colonoscopy, is required to find the cause of the bleeding. In most cases it will not be bowel cancer but it is important to check.

Those turning 50, 54, 55, 58, 60, 64, 68, 70, 72 or 74 in 2017 will receive a free FOBT in the mail as part of the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program. Once fully implemented in 2020, the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program will send a free kit every two years to all Australians aged 50–74.

**If you are over 50 and not yet eligible for the national program, we encourage you to:**

- ask your doctor about doing an FOBT
- purchase a kit from Cancer Council SA by calling 13 11 20 or go to cancersa.org.au.

It could save your life.
Lung cancer

Lung cancer occurs when the cells in the lung begin to grow abnormally. It usually begins in the lining of the airway.

Lung cancer is the most common cause of death from cancer among Australian men.

Not only can smoking lead to lung cancer it also increases your chance of cancer of the mouth, tongue, nose, nasal sinus, throat, voice box, oesophagus, bowel, ureter, bladder, kidneys, pancreas, liver, stomach and bone marrow (myeloid leukaemia).

Smoking also affects the ability to have and maintain an erection, and may lower your sperm count.

Lung cancer warning signs

Lung cancer is very hard to detect early but you should see your doctor if you notice any of the following:

- a cough that won’t go away or a change in a cough that has been present for some time (this is the most common symptom)
- shortness of breath
- fatigue
- unexplained weight loss
- hoarseness
- blood-stained sputum or coughing up blood
- chest pain
- pneumonia or bronchitis that keeps coming back
- difficulty swallowing.

It is never too late to quit smoking

Quitting smoking at any age will benefit your health. After 24 hours most nicotine will be out of your bloodstream. Within months your immune system will improve. And after ten years, your risk of lung cancer will be lower than that of a continuing smoker (provided the disease is not already present).

Quitting can be difficult but you can call Quitline on 13 7848 to speak to a trained smoking cessation counsellor (8:30 am – 8:00 pm Monday to Friday and 2:00 pm – 5:00 pm Saturday).

Am I at risk?

Up to 90% of lung cancers in men are caused by smoking or passive smoking. It is more common in adults aged over 40 who have smoked for at least 20 years.

However, smoking at any age and for any length of time increases your risk of lung cancer.
Skin cancer

Australia has one of the highest rates of skin cancer in the world with more than 2,000 Australians dying each year. Despite being the most preventable of all cancers, at least two in every three Australians will develop skin cancer before the age of 70.

Melanoma kills more than twice as many men as women in Australia and is the third most common cancer in men (after prostate and bowel cancer).

Types of skin cancer
Skin cancers form when skin cells are damaged by ultraviolet (UV) radiation from the sun. There are three main types of skin cancer:

- **basal cell carcinoma** is the most common and least dangerous form of skin cancer
- **squamous cell carcinoma** is less common but more dangerous than basal cell carcinoma
- **melanoma** is the least common but deadliest form of skin cancer.

Skin cancer warning signs
The majority of all skin cancers can be successfully treated if found early. It is important to get to know your skin and what is normal for you so changes will be noticed quickly.

Everyone should check their skin regularly. Check all of your skin not just sun-exposed areas. See your doctor if you notice anything unusual including:

- a new spot, lump or unusual freckle
- a mole, sunspot or sore that does not heal
- a spot that looks different from other spots around it
- a spot that has changed colour, size or shape over a few weeks or months

- a spot that has an irregular border or becomes itchy or bleeds.

Being SunSmart: finding a balance
The sun’s UV radiation is the major cause of skin cancer but is also the best natural source of vitamin D. When the UV Index is 3 and above use a combination of the five SunSmart steps:

- **Slip** on sun protective clothing that covers as much skin as possible
- **Slop** on SPF30 or higher sunscreen and make sure it is broad spectrum and water resistant
- **Slap** on a hat that protects your face, head, neck and ears
- **Seek** shade
- **Slide** on sunglasses that meet Australian Standards.

To maintain vitamin D levels, most South Australians need a few minutes of mid-morning or mid-afternoon sun exposure each day. When the UV level is 3 and above a combination of sun protection measures is recommended when outdoors for more than a few minutes. In summer most adults will maintain adequate levels of vitamin D from sun exposure during typical day to day outdoor activities. In late autumn and winter when the UV level is below 3, sun protection is not recommended. During these times, to support vitamin D production, it is recommended that people are outdoors in the middle of the day with some skin uncovered on most days. Some people in Australia may be at risk of vitamin D deficiency and discussing this with a GP is recommended.

Check the daily sun protection times at cancersa.org.au/sunsmart-apps, in daily newspapers or on the SunSmart app for iPhone, iPad or Android devices.
Testicular cancer

Testicular cancer is one of the rarer forms of cancer. Less than seven in every 100,000 men are diagnosed with testicular cancer each year. It is also the most curable of all internal cancers.

Am I at risk?

- Testicular cancer is more common in young men. About half of new diagnoses occur in men under 34 years.
- Testicular cancer is more common in men who are born with an undescended or partially descended testicle or testes.

Testicular cancer warning signs

Early signs of testicular cancer may appear as:

- a hard lump on the testicle
- swelling or enlargement of the testicle
- pain or discomfort in the testicle or scrotum
- an unusual difference between one testicle and the other
- a heavy or dragging feeling in the scrotum.

Early diagnosis and treatment can cure almost all cases of testicular cancer.

If you notice any unusual changes to your testes, see your doctor immediately.

Obesity and cancer

The distribution of excess body fat is important to cancer risk and abdominal fat increases cancer risk compared to excess fat elsewhere on the body. Men with a waistline bigger than 94 cm are at higher risk.

Maintaining a healthy weight is about getting the balance right between what you eat and drink, and how active you are.

We recommend you:

- reduce food and drinks which are high in fats, sugars and salt
- reduce your intake of red meat and processed meats such as bacon, sausages, salami and ham
- limit or avoid alcoholic drinks
- choose skim or reduced fat milk and dairy products
- choose fish, poultry or vegetarian options for some meals
- choose wholegrain or wholemeal breads and cereals
- eat plenty of vegetables, legumes and beans
- do one hour of a moderate activity, such as cycling, or 30 minutes of vigorous activity, such as jogging, on most days
- reduce the amount of food you put on your plate at mealtimes—you might find you don’t need as much food as you think to feel full.
Alcohol and cancer

Drinking alcohol, even in moderate amounts, increases the risk of cancers of the mouth, pharynx, larynx, oesophagus, liver and bowel in men.

To reduce the risk of cancer you should limit your intake of alcohol. Cancer Council recommends no more than two standard drinks a day and to have a few alcohol-free days every week.

A standard drink equals:

- 425 ml of light strength (2.7%) beer [one pint]
- 375 ml of mid strength (3.5%) beer
- 285 ml of full strength (4.9%) beer [one schooner]
- 100 ml of wine (one small glass)
- 30 ml of spirits (one measure)

For information and support

Cancer Council 13 11 20
For confidential information and support speak with a Cancer Council nurse.

Quitline 13 7848
For advice and counselling on quitting smoking.

Cancer Connect
If you are diagnosed with cancer it can be helpful to talk to a man who has had a similar experience. Cancer Connect is a free, confidential service with trained volunteers providing one-to-one telephone support and practical information for those affected by cancer. Call 13 11 20 for more information.

Useful websites

Cancer Council SA
cancersa.org.au

Cut Your Cancer Risk
cutyourcancerrisk.org.au

Quit
cancersa.org.au/quitline

Prostate Cancer Foundation of Australia
prostate.org.au

Australian Prostate Cancer Collaboration
prostatehealth.org.au

Andrology Australia
andrologyaustralia.org

Foundation 49
49.com.au

National Bowel Cancer Screening Program
cancerscreening.gov.au
Note to reader
Always consult your doctor about matters that affect your health. This information is intended as a general introduction and is not a substitute for professional medical, legal or financial advice. Information about cancer is constantly being updated and revised by the medical and research communities. While all care is taken to ensure accuracy at the time of publication, Cancer Council Australia and its members exclude all liability for any injury, loss or damage incurred by use of or reliance on the information provided.

For information and support about cancer:
• call Cancer Council 13 11 20
• chat online at cancersa.org.au
• email askanurse@cancersa.org.au.
This is a free and confidential service available Monday to Friday 8:30 am – 5:30 pm

202 Greenhill Road
Eastwood SA 5063
t 08 8291 4111
PO Box 929,
f 08 8291 4122
Unley BC SA 5061
askanurse@cancersa.org.au
cancersa.org.au