Cancer Council Victoria

A brief look at men's cancers

Cancer Council Helpline 13 11 20
www.cancervic.org.au

In brief: men and cancer

One in two Australian men will develop cancer in their lifetime.

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 third of all cancers in Australia can be prevented. There are seven ways to cut your cancer risk:

1. Quit smoking
2. Check for unusual changes and have regular, appropriate screening tests
3. Maintain a healthy weight
4. Be SunSmart
5. Eat a healthy diet with plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables, and limit processed meats
6. Be physically active
7. Limit or avoid alcohol.

Prostate cancer

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

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

Am I at risk?

Prostate cancer is the most common cancer in men. It mainly affects men over 65 and is very rare in men younger than 45.

As well as getting older, having a father or brother with prostate cancer, particularly if it was diagnosed before the age of 60, increases your risk. 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.

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, it is a good idea to speak to your doctor if you have any of these symptoms.

Low-down on prostate cancer testing

Testing usually starts with a blood test to measure levels of prostate specific antigens in the blood (**a PSA test**). This is often done along with a **digital rectal examination** (DRE) which involves your doctor placing a finger inside the rectum (or back passage) to check for changes to the surface of the prostate.

Neither test will confirm if cancer is present, but they do act as a warning, and 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 that are unlikely to cause harm.

Because testing for prostate cancer is not straight forward 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.

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

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 70 Australians every week and affects men and women. However, if caught early enough, nearly all cases can be cured.

Am I at risk?

Your risk of bowel cancer is greater if you:

- are aged 50 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
- have a waistline over 100 cm.

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 symptoms.

Bottom line on beating bowel cancer

If you are 50 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 investigation, usually colonoscopy, is required to determine the cause of the bleeding. In most cases it will not be bowel cancer but it is important to check.

Those turning 50, 55 or 65 will receive a free FOBT in the mail as part of the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program.

If you are over 50 and not yet eligible for the national program, ask your doctor about doing an FOBT or purchase one from Cancer Council at cancervic.org.au/boweltest or by calling 13 11 20. 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.

Smoking not only leads to lung cancer; it also increases your chance of cancer of the mouth, nose, throat, voice box, oesophagus, bladder, liver, ureter, kidneys, stomach, pancreas, bowel and bone marrow (myeloid leukemia). Smoking also affects the ability to have and maintain an erection, and may lower your sperm count.

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.

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

Quitting smoking at any age will benefit your health. After 12 hours most nicotine will be out of your bloodstream. Within months your immune system will improve. And after 10 years, your risk of lung cancer will be markedly lower than that of a continuing smoker and will continue to decline (provided the disease is not already present).

Quitting can be difficult, but you can call the Quitline at any time on 13 78 48 (13 QUIT) to request a Quitpack, or to speak to a trained Quit advisor (8am – 8pm, Monday to Friday).

Skin cancer

Australia has one of the highest rates of skin cancer in the world, with more than 1830 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 almost 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 deadliest form of skin cancer and the least common.

Skin cancer warning signs

Over 95% of skin cancers can be treated if found early so it's important to get to know your skin and what is normal for you so changes will be quickly noticed.

All Australians should check their skin regularly. For men over 40 years of age and those who work outside this should be at least with each change of season. Check all of your skin, not just sun-exposed areas. See your doctor if you notice:

- 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: a balance

The sun's UV radiation is the major cause of skin cancer but is also the best natural source of vitamin D.

Prevention is better than cure. When the UV Index is 3 or above, use a combination of the five SunSmart steps:

- Slip on sun protective clothing that covers as much skin as possible.
- Slop on SPF30+ 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 help with vitamin D levels most Victorians with fair to olive skin need a few minutes of sun exposure a day between September and April and two to three hours a week from May to August. People with naturally very dark skin may need three to six times this amount of sun exposure.

Check the SunSmart UV Alert daily at sunsmart.com.au, in daily newspapers or on the SunSmart app. Remember that UV levels are most intense during the middle of the day so be extra vigilant.

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 31 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

Cancer Council research shows men with a waistline bigger than 100 cm are more likely to get cancer, in particular bowel and prostate cancer – two of the most common cancers in men.

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

We recommend you:

- reduce food and drinks which are high in fats and sugars, such as soft drink and fast foods
- limit or avoid alcoholic drinks
- choose non-fat or reduced fat milk and dairy products
- choose fish, poultry or vegetarian options for some meals
- do one hour of a moderate activity, such as cycling, or 30 minutes of vigorous activity, such as jogging, most days
- reduce the amount of food you put on your plate at mealtimes; you might find you need to eat less than you think to feel full.

Alcohol and cancer

Consuming 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 or, better still, avoid it altogether. For people who do drink alcohol, Cancer Council recommends no more than two standard drinks a day.

Remember, binge drinking also contributes to the lifetime risk of cancer, so saving all your units for the weekend is not recommended!

Have at least one or two alcohol free days every week.

A standard drink equals:

- 375 ml of mid strength (3.5%) beer
- 285 ml of beer (one glass)
- 100 ml of wine (one small glass)
- 30 ml of spirits (one measure)

For information and advice

Cancer Council Helpline 13 11 20

For confidential information, support and referral to support groups.

Quitline 13 78 48

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 Victoria
www.cancervic.org.au

Cut Your Cancer Risk
www.cutyourcancerrisk.org.au

Quit
www.quit.org.au

QuitCoach
www.quitcoach.org.au

Australian Prostate Cancer Collaboration
www.prostatehealth.org.au

Andrology Australia
www.andrologyaustralia.org

Foundation 49
www.49.com.au

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