

Consumer Health: Reducing your risk of esophageal cancer

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April is Esophageal Cancer Awareness Month, which makes this good time to learn what you can do to reduce your risk of developing esophageal cancer.

Approximately 20,640 new cases of [esophageal cancer](#)—16,510 in men and 4,130 in [women](#)—will be diagnosed in the U.S. this year, and 16,410 people—13,250 men and 3,160 women—will die from the disease, according to the American Cancer Society.

Esophageal cancer usually begins in the cells that line the inside of the esophagus—a long, hollow tube that runs from your throat to your stomach. Your esophagus helps move the food you swallow from the back of your throat to your stomach to be digested.

Esophageal cancer is more common among men than women, and it can occur anywhere along the esophagus. Signs and symptoms of esophageal cancer include difficulty swallowing, unexplained weight loss, heartburn, coughing, hoarseness, and [chest pain](#) or pressure. As the cancer advances, complications can include obstruction of the esophagus, pain, and bleeding that can be sudden and severe at times.

Here are four [steps](#) you can take to reduce your risk of esophageal cancer:

- **Quit smoking:** If you smoke, talk to your [health](#) care professional about strategies for quitting. If you don't use tobacco, don't start.
- **Drink alcohol in moderation, if at all:** If you choose to drink alcohol, do so in moderation. For [healthy adults](#), that means up to one drink a day for women and up to two drinks a day for men.
- **Eat more fruits and vegetables:** Add a variety of colorful fruits and vegetables to your diet.
- **Maintain a healthy weight:** If you are overweight or obese, talk to your health care professional about strategies to help you lose weight. Aim for a slow and steady weight loss of 1 or 2 pounds per week.

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