

Liver Cancer

Awareness, prevention
and support



What is liver cancer?

Cancer that starts in the liver tissue – the 17th most common cancer in the UK.

What causes liver cancer?

It's not always clear what causes liver cancer. You have a higher risk if you have certain medical conditions, such as hepatitis, liver cirrhosis, gallstones, diabetes, a parasite in the liver (liver flukes) or HIV. A family history also increases risk, along with preventable lifestyle factors.

Who can get liver cancer?

Anyone can develop primary liver cancer, but the risk increases with age. It is more common in people over 60, with the highest rates among those aged 85 to 89. Having a family history of primary liver cancer may also increase your risk.

How common is liver cancer?

Liver cancer is the 17th most common cancer in the UK, with around 7,000 people diagnosed every year. It's slightly more common in men than women.

How preventable is liver cancer?

While some risk factors for liver cancer, like your age and family history, are out of your control, you can reduce your risk by maintaining a healthy weight, cutting down how much alcohol you drink and not smoking.

Is there a screening programme for liver cancer?

There isn't a national screening programme for primary liver cancer in the UK. If you're at higher risk for HCC because you have liver cirrhosis or hepatitis B, you might have regular scans and blood tests to catch it at an early, treatable stage.

What if someone has a family history of liver cancer?

People with a family history of liver cancer, as well as risk factors such as liver cirrhosis or hepatitis B, should speak to their GP. They may be referred to a genetic counsellor who can assess their risk and talk through any next steps.

37%

Of men and women aged 55+ do not link high alcohol consumption with cancer risk

40%

Of men and women aged 55+ worry about getting cancer

49%

Of men and women aged 55+ say they've never received cancer risk information during healthcare appointments

How is liver cancer diagnosed?

If you have some of the signs and symptoms of liver cancer, your GP will probably do a physical examination and might order blood tests. They might refer you to the hospital for more tests or refer you directly to a specialist.

- Blood tests
- Scans, like an ultrasound scan, CT scan or MRI scan
- A biopsy, where a small sample of cells is taken from your body for testing



What signs or symptoms should people be aware of?



Primary liver cancer doesn't usually cause symptoms in the early stages. If you do have symptoms, they can include:

- Weight loss
- Feeling or being sick
- Loss of appetite or feeling full after eating small amounts
- Yellowing of the skin and whites of the eyes (jaundice)
- Itching
- Swollen tummy or a lump in your abdomen

These symptoms don't always mean cancer, but it's important to get any new or ongoing symptom checked by a GP.

- Pain or discomfort in your abdomen
- Pain in your right shoulder or in your back
- Feeling weak or tired (fatigue)
- High temperature (fever)

Do these symptoms mean someone definitely has liver cancer?

No. The symptoms above can be caused by many things other than cancer, but if they're new for you, it's important to get them checked by a GP.

What should I do if I notice these symptoms?

Contact your GP if you notice any of these symptoms, or if you're feeling worried about your risk. Most symptoms are not caused by cancer, but catching problems early gives the best chance of successful treatment.