Keep a healthy weight, cut your cancer risk
Many of us would like to lose some weight. Over half of the UK population are overweight. We know taking control of your weight is not always easy, but it does have many health benefits.

Keeping a healthy weight is a great way to reduce your risk of cancer. Eating healthily and becoming more active will help you keep your weight stable or even lose weight.

In this leaflet you can find out about:
- the link between weight and cancer
- how your genes and lifestyle affect your weight
- advice for taking control of your weight.
What are the risks?

Being overweight causes around 13,000 cases of cancer in the UK every year. We know that weighing more than doctors recommend increases the risk of a number of different cancers. These include the following cancers:

- Gullet cancer (oesophagus)
- Breast cancer (in women)
- Gallbladder cancer
- Kidney cancer
- Pancreatic cancer
- Womb cancer (in women)
- Bowel cancer
How does being overweight cause cancer?

Fat cells in the body produce hormones. Hormones have an important role to play in controlling how your body works. But high levels of certain hormones seem to increase the risk of cancer. Scientists think that this may be why being overweight increases the risk of cancer.

Genes or lifestyle?
Your genes can affect how likely you are to gain weight. This is partly because your genes affect the lifestyle choices you make.

For example your genes may mean you are:
• more sensitive to the smell or sight of food
• less able to sense when you are full.

People with genes linked to obesity are not ‘destined’ to become overweight. But they will have to work harder to keep a healthy weight.
Measuring your own risk

Doctors use a tool called Body Mass Index (BMI) to work out what an adult of a particular height should weigh for best health. Find out whether your BMI is healthy by finding your height and weight on this chart.

BMI is a useful tool for most people but is not accurate if you are under 18, a professional athlete, pregnant or breastfeeding.
Does body shape matter?

There is increasing evidence that where fat is stored on your body also affects your health.

People with an ‘apple’ shaped body, with fat stored around their waist, seem to be more at risk of cancer, heart disease and diabetes than people who are ‘pear’ shaped.

You have a higher risk of health problems if your waist is:
• more than 80cm (32”) for women
• more than 94cm (37”) for men.
Take control of your weight

Weight gain happens when you take in more energy than you use up. Losing weight is a gradual process which takes time.

To lose weight permanently you will need to transform your routines and the way you think about food and physical activity for good.

Make small changes to your daily life
Try to eat fewer fatty and sugary foods, reduce your portion sizes and cut down on sugary and alcoholic drinks.

Next, try to become more physically active. This does not need to cost money or involve complicated exercise programmes. Enjoy walking, gardening, swimming, cycling and taking the stairs instead of the lift.

Make sure your goals are realistic
For most people who are overweight losing 0.5–1kg (1–2lb) each week is excellent progress. Some weeks will be more difficult than others, but the key is to keep going.
Further information

About weight and cancer
For our Ten Top Tips for a healthy weight, and more about weight and the science behind our messages visit www.cancerresearchuk.org/health

You may also want to look at the weight loss information on Weight Concern's website www.weightconcern.org.uk

For advice on losing weight and resources in your area visit your doctor. Ask your doctor to refer you to specialised weight loss services.

About cancer
For information about living with cancer visit www.cancerhelp.org.uk

If you want to talk in confidence about cancer, call our information nurses on freephone 0808 8004040.

Order more leaflets
You can order our full range of leaflets free online at www.cancerresearchuk.org/leaflets

Support Cancer Research UK
If you would like to support our work please call 020 7121 6699 or visit www.cancerresearchuk.org

Together we will beat cancer