What should you look out for?
It is important to know what is normal for you and spot any changes, so you can tell your doctor without delay. Most changes will not be caused by cancer, but it is better to play safe. If you notice any changes like those described in this leaflet make sure you see your doctor.

Look out for:
• difficulty in swallowing
• a hoarse voice or a cough that will not go away
• heartburn or indigestion
• unexplained weight loss
• coughing up blood
• vomiting.

Some of these symptoms are very common and are not usually caused by cancer. But it is important to see your doctor if you notice any of these changes.

Further information
For more about the signs and symptoms of cancer visit spotcancerearly.com
For more about cancer visit our patient information website cruk.org/cancer-help
If you want to talk in confidence about cancer, call our information nurses on freephone 0808 800 4040.

Our health messages are based on scientific evidence. Find out more at cruk.org/health
All our leaflets are thoroughly researched and based on the most up-to-date scientific evidence. They are reviewed by independent experts and updated regularly. You can order our full range of leaflets free online at cruk.org/leaflets

About Cancer Research UK
CRUK pioneers life-saving research to bring forward the day when all cancers are cured. From our volunteers and supporters to our scientists, doctors and nurses, we’re all here to save more lives and prevent, control and cure all cancers. If you would like to support our work, please call 0300 123 1861 or visit our website cruk.org

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**What is the oesophagus?**
It is part of the digestive system and is the tube that carries food and liquids from your mouth to your stomach. Damage to the oesophagus can lead to cancer.

**What increases your risk?**

**Age**
Like most cancers, the risk of oesophageal cancer increases with age. Only a few people develop the disease before the age of 40. In the UK it is more common in men than women.

**Heartburn or acid reflux**
Acid reflux happens when stomach acid flows back into the oesophagus. This can cause pain known as heartburn. Acid reflux can damage the lining of the oesophagus. This can increase the risk of cancer, especially if it happens often over a long period of time.

Heartburn and acid reflux in themselves are not serious. But if you suffer from either of them, especially if it keeps happening, it is important to see your doctor so they can help you.

**How can you reduce your risk?**
Most cases of oesophageal cancer could be prevented through lifestyle changes, such as:

**Being a non-smoker and avoiding tobacco**
Smoking increases your chance of developing oesophageal cancer. Chewing tobacco or betel nut can also increase the risk of the disease. The sooner you quit, the sooner you begin to reduce your risk.

**Drinking less alcohol**
If you drink alcohol, try to drink less. The more you cut down the more you reduce your risk.

If you drink alcohol and smoke your risk is even greater. People who smoke and drink heavily have 20 times higher risk of oesophageal cancer compared to people who do neither.

**Keeping a healthy weight**
Try to maintain a healthy weight by being more active and eating healthily. Being overweight can increase your risk.

**Eating your 5-a-day could help**
Eating a diet which is high in fruit and vegetables may help to reduce the risk of oesophageal cancer. Try to eat at least five portions every day. Choosing a variety of different coloured fruits and vegetables will help you get a broad range of vitamins and minerals.