How many cancers can be prevented?

Although there are some things we can’t control about our cancer risk, decades of research have clearly shown that by living a healthy life, people can reduce the risk of developing the disease. But how many cancers in the UK are really caused by things we can change?

This diagram shows the results of new research funded by Cancer Research UK, which aims to show the number of cancer cases in the UK that could be prevented by known lifestyle and environmental factors, like being a non-smoker, keeping a healthy weight, drinking less alcohol, eating a healthy, balanced diet, and avoiding being exposed to certain infections or radiation.

The thin lines show the total number of cancers of each type from the latest UK incidence figures, and the large bars in the centre of each line show the proportion of these cases that could be prevented in men and women. Around the outside, you’ll see the lifestyle and environmental factors that are linked to each cancer type. On the left is the contribution of each lifestyle factor to cancer overall.

The key explains how the number of cases of a particular cancer of a particular gender is calculated. The number is based on the latest UK incidence figures, and the contribution of each lifestyle factor is based on the latest research. The number is then scaled between 0 and 200 to fit the diagram. The key also shows the number of cancers of each type that could be prevented by changing each lifestyle factor.