

Risk Factors and Screening Guidelines for the 12 Most Commonly Diagnosed Cancers

Why cancer occurs is not known, but certain things can increase your chances of developing the disease. Cancer risk factors fall into two broad categories—controllable and uncontrollable. Lifestyle or behavioral factors, such as smoking, are controllable. Other factors, such as age and gender, are uncontrollable. In some cases, risk factors may overlap or may work together to increase your risk. Individual risk factors do not mean you will develop cancer but indicate that your risk for developing cancer is increased. If you find that you are at risk for developing cancer, follow the screening guidelines and get regular checkups by your doctor.

Type of Cancer	Risk Factors	Screening Guidelines
Breast cancer	Uncontrollable Female gender Increasing age Family history of breast cancer Personal history of breast cancer History of radiation treatment History of breast biopsy; confirmed atypical hyperplasia Beginning menstrual periods before age 12 or experiencing menopause after age 50 Bearing few or no children Having first child after age 30 Controllable Taking birth control pills Taking estrogen replacement therapy Not breast-feeding Alcohol consumption Diet high in fat Lack of exercise	Ages 20–39 Monthly breast self-examination Physical examination of breasts by a physician every three years Age 40 and older Monthly breast self-examination Physical examination of breasts by a physician every year Screening mammogram every year Women with strong family histories of breast cancer may benefit from genetic testing for a breast cancer susceptibility gene.
Cervical cancer	Uncontrollable History of abnormal Pap test Weakened immune system Controllable Multiple sexual partners History of sexually transmitted viruses Smoking	Age 18 or after becoming sexually active Yearly Pap test and pelvic examination After three or more consecutive, satisfactory, normal annual examinations, the Pap test may be performed less frequently at the discretion of the physician.
Colorectal cancer	Uncontrollable Family history of colorectal cancer Personal history of colorectal cancer Personal history of polyps 50 years of age and older Controllable Diet high in fat Obesity Lack of exercise	Age 50 and older Yearly fecal occult blood test plus flexible sigmoidoscopy every five years <i>or</i> Colonoscopy every 10 years <i>or</i> Double contrast barium enema every 5–10 years Those with a personal or family history of colorectal cancer or polyps may need to modify these guidelines.
Leukemia and lymphoma	Uncontrollable History of chemotherapy Controllable Benzene exposure High-dose radiation exposure Smoking	If you have any of these risk factors, discuss them with your healthcare provider.
Liver cancer	Uncontrollable History of hepatitis B History of hepatitis C History of cirrhosis Controllable Chemical exposure Anabolic steroid use Tobacco use	If you have any of these risk factors, discuss them with your healthcare provider.
Lung cancer	Uncontrollable Increasing age Controllable Smoking Asbestos exposure Carcinogen exposure in workplace Radon gas exposure Lung scarring from certain pneumonias	If you have any of these risk factors, discuss them with your healthcare provider.
Oral cancer	Uncontrollable Male gender Age older than 60 African American race History of gastroesophageal reflux Controllable Using tobacco products Alcohol consumption Chemical exposure Poor nutrition	Ages 20–40 Cancer-related checkup of the oral cavity every three years Age older than 40 Cancer-related checkup of the oral cavity every year
Pancreas cancer	Uncontrollable Age older than 60 Male gender African American race History of diabetes Controllable Smoking Diet high in meats Diet high in fats	If you have any of these risk factors, discuss them with your healthcare provider.
Prostate cancer	Uncontrollable Male gender Increasing age African American race Family history of prostate cancer Controllable Diet high in fat	Age 50 and older (age 40 and older for people at high risk) Digital rectal examination by a physician every year Prostate specific antigen test every year
Skin cancer and melanoma	Uncontrollable Fair skin Male gender Long-term skin problems Weak immune system Controllable Exposure to strong sunlight or tanning beds Chemical exposure Radiation exposure Psoriasis treatment	Monthly skin examination Ages 20–40 Cancer-related checkup every three years Age older than 40 Cancer-related checkup every year
Urinary tract cancer	Uncontrollable Caucasian race Age older than 60 Chronic bladder problems History of bladder cancer Controllable Smoking Chemical exposure, especially to aromatic amines	Age 18 and older If you have any of these risk factors, discuss them with your healthcare provider.
Uterine and ovarian cancer	Uncontrollable Female gender Family history of uterine or ovarian cancer Personal history of infertility problems, irregular menstrual periods, breast cancer, colorectal cancer, or endometrial hyperplasia (uterine) Bearing few or no children Beginning menstrual periods before age 12 or experiencing menopause after age 50 Controllable Taking fertility drugs (ovarian) Diet high in fat Taking birth control pills	Age 18 and older Pelvic examination every year Women should be encouraged to report any unexpected bleeding or spotting.