

**Give  
yourself  
a fighting  
chance**



**Prevent cancer by embracing a healthy lifestyle**

After menopause there is an increased risk of cancer; being proactive in managing a healthy lifestyle will significantly reduce your risk.

For further information visit [www.imsociety.org](http://www.imsociety.org)



**International Menopause Society**

promoting education and research on all aspects of adult women's health

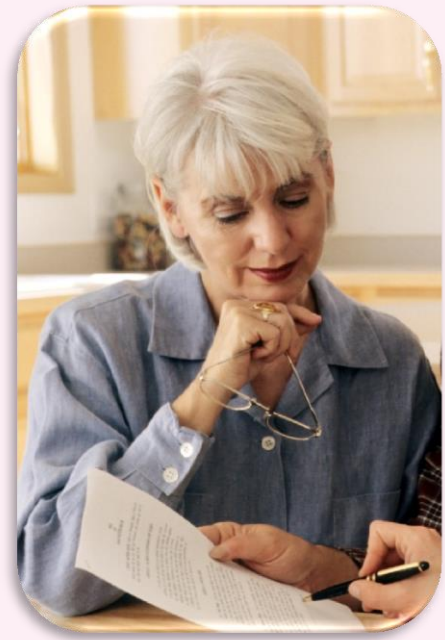
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## Understand your risk of cancer in middle age

**When aging, women have an increased risk of developing cancer; embracing healthy lifestyle changes and empowering yourself with knowledge can proactively help to prevent cancer.**

### What is menopause?

The menopause is a natural life change; it is not a disease. It's a transition and each woman's experience is very individual. As a woman approaches the menopause (perimenopause) there is a decrease in the production of the sex hormones estrogen, progesterone and testosterone. These hormonal changes mark the end of a woman's ability to ovulate and have children, and eventually lead to a final menstrual period. The menopause transition can last many years (the average is 4 years); however, a woman is not considered to be post menopause until she has experienced at least 12 months without any menstrual bleeding. <sup>[1.]</sup> Most women become menopausal naturally between the ages of 45 and 55 years, with the average age of menopause being around 51 years depending on her ethnic group. Unfortunately, the symptoms of the menopause can affect a woman diversely for many years. <sup>[2.]</sup>



### Symptoms of menopause

Due to extreme fluctuations in hormone levels, the most common and problematic symptoms of the menopause are hot flushes (hot flashes) and night sweats. <sup>[3.]</sup> Other symptoms include body aches and pains, loss of libido, urinary frequency and sleeping difficulties. Some of these symptoms often improve with time and can disappear post menopause. Symptoms specifically due to low estrogen levels, which include vaginal dryness and dry skin, can continue post menopause for many years. <sup>[4.]</sup>

### Understanding cancer and the increased risk in middle age

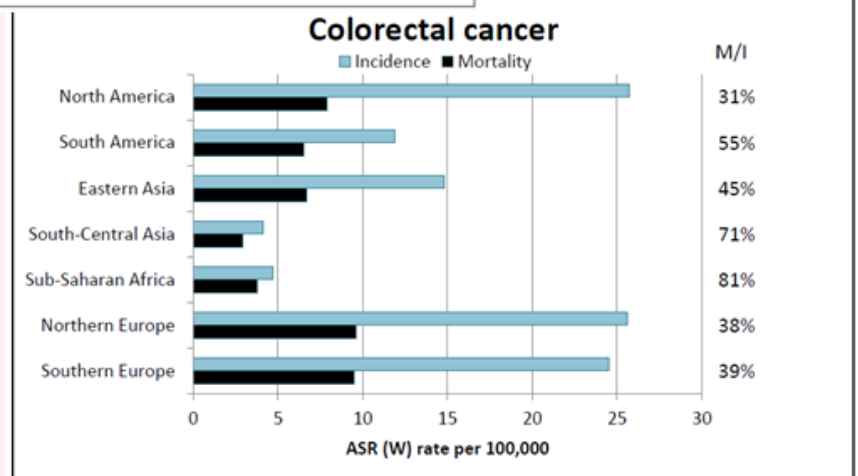
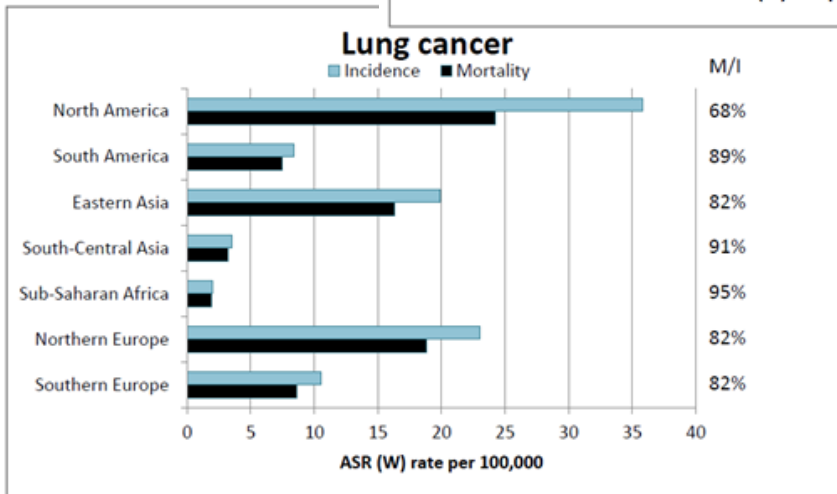
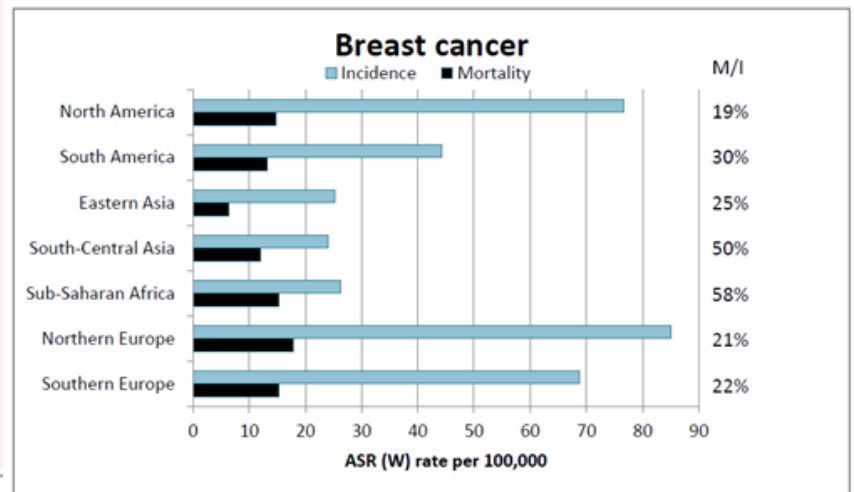
Cancer is a disease caused by normal cells growing in an uncontrollable and abnormal way. The uncontrolled growth causes a lump called a tumour to form. Not all tumours are cancerous. Benign tumours do not grow uncontrollably, do not invade neighbouring tissues, and do not spread throughout the body whilst cancerous tumours spread to other parts of the body through the lymphatic system or bloodstream. <sup>[5.]</sup> There are over 200 different known cancers that afflict humans and approximately 5 – 10% of cancers are hereditary. <sup>[6.]</sup>

Determining what causes cancer is complex; cancer incidence is increasing with aging. Many factors are known to increase the risk of cancer, including smoking, infections, exposure to radiation, obesity, alcohol, physical inactivity, infections (cervical cancer), and environmental factors: <sup>[7.]</sup> These can directly damage genes or combine with existing genetic faults within our cells to cause the disease. <sup>[8.]</sup> Smoking plays a dominant role in the development of lung cancer, whilst obesity is characteristic of endometrial, colon and breast cancer. The number of sexual partners, smoking and HPV (genital warts) has a strong correlation to cervical cancer.

Cancer can be detected in a number of ways: individuals may experience certain signs and symptoms, or screening tests and medical imaging may uncover cancer. Cancer is usually treated with chemotherapy, radiation therapy or surgery. The chances of surviving cancer vary greatly by the type of cancer, its location in the body and how advanced it is at the start of treatment. Whilst cancer can affect people of all ages, the risk of developing cancer increases with age. <sup>[9.]</sup>

## Facts and figures

Cardio / circulatory diseases represent 35% – 40% of causes of death in most developed countries and 20% – 25% of women will die from cancers in Western Europe, Australasia, high-income North America, high-income Asia Pacific, East Asia and Southern Latin America. Breast cancer, lung cancer and colorectal cancer are prevalent in most regions of the world: [10].



## Research

The International Menopause Society (IMS) undertook a systematic review to summarise the literature regarding the impact of the menopause and associated risk factors of cancer (published in the peer-reviewed journal, *Climacteric*)<sup>[10]</sup>. As a result of the review of the evidence, the IMS concludes that cancer is an important cause of death but not the primary cause of mortality with cervical cancer remaining a hallmark of low access to healthcare.

Preventative strategies (decreasing smoking and alcohol consumption, losing weight, eating a healthy diet and undertaking physical activity) and implementation of screening could help to significantly decrease the incidence and mortality from cancer. The mortality / incidence ratio is higher in developing countries compared to high-income regions as well as in subgroups of populations in developed countries with lower socioeconomic levels.

Implementation of better diagnostic methods and management of cancer according to local resources will help to decrease the mortality rate in developing countries, and effort has to be made to decrease social inequities and improve access to healthcare for low-income groups.

Cancer incidence is increasing as a consequence of longer life expectancy all over the world. National health programs are mandatory to implement screening and to improve individual management.

Educating women so that they are aware of ways to improve their general health, to minimise their own risk factors and to identify signs of change in their own health which may be markers of impending cancer, will help to reduce the burden of disease and improve the prognosis for tumors detected at an earlier stage.



## Top 10 tips to prevent cancer at middle age

Preventative measures and being proactive in managing a balanced and healthy lifestyle will significantly reduce the risk of cancer according to The World Cancer Research Fund (WCRF) and the American Institute of Cancer Research (AICR): <sup>[11.]</sup>

- 1. Maintain a healthy weight** – this may help to lower the risk of various types of cancer, including cancer of the breast, prostate, lung, colon and kidney.
- 2. Get fit** – take regular exercise of 30 minutes of vigorous activity a day. Physical activity on its own has been shown to decrease most cancers especially breast cancer <sup>[13.]</sup>, and keeping fit will help to decrease body mass index and insulin resistance.
- 3. Don't smoke** – smoking has many links to various types of cancer, such as lung cancer, head and neck cancer and bladder cancer. Chewing tobacco has been linked to oral cancer and pancreatic cancer. Even if you don't use tobacco, exposure to passive smoke might increase your risk of lung cancer. Stopping smoking can decrease the risk of dying from cancer by more than 20%. <sup>[10.]</sup>
- 4. Aim to have 5 portions of fruit or vegetables a day** - making healthy food choices might help reduce your risk of cancer. A balanced diet contains fruits, vegetables and other foods from plant sources, such as whole grains and beans.
- 5. Follow a low fat diet** - high-fat diets tend to be higher in calories and might increase the risk of obesity; this can increase cancer risk. Health Authorities recommend an average 2000 calorie intake a day for women of 2,000 calories. As you approach middle age, your body changes and you will need fewer calories to maintain your weight. Diet strongly influences the risk of colorectal, breast and endometrial cancers; changes in food habits might reduce up to 70% of the colon cancer burden. <sup>[12.]</sup>
- 6. Moderate your alcohol intake** - the risk of cancer of the breast, colon, lung, kidney, oesophagus and liver increases with the amount of alcohol you drink and the frequency of your drinking habits. Low-risk women are advised to limit their daily alcohol intake to no more than half a glass whilst a more restrictive policy is recommended for women at high risk of breast, colon or endometrial cancer. <sup>[14.]</sup>
- 7. Protect yourself from the sun** - skin cancer is a common type of cancer and one of the most preventable. Avoiding the midday sun when the sun's rays are strongest and staying in the shade when you're outdoors will help to avoid unnecessary risks. When applying sun cream it is important to use generous amounts and reapply it frequently.
- 8. Get immunised** - hepatitis B and human papillomavirus (HPV) can increase the risk of developing cancer so check with your healthcare professional to check your immunisation status.
- 9. Practice safe sex and use a condom** – an effective cancer prevention tactic is to avoid risky behaviours that can lead to sexually transmitted infections which, in turn, might increase the risk of cancer.
- 10. Visit your healthcare professional** - regular self-exams and screenings for various types of cancers can increase your chances of discovering cancer early, when treatment is most likely to be successful. A systematic follow-up at least once a year by a trained practitioner is recommended for each woman in midlife and beyond. This will allow evaluation of the individual risks for each potential disease associated with aging.



In the meantime, if you experience any abnormal symptoms you should seek medical advice:

- Abnormal vaginal bleeding, abdominal or pelvic pain, swelling, abnormal vaginal discharge, blood in urine or stools can reveal an endometrial, ovarian or colon cancer.
- Breast nipple discharge or formation of a lump, or a skin abnormality on the surface of the breasts can indicate breast cancer.
- Unusual cough, shortness of breath, coughing-up blood or throat pain can reveal a lung cancer.
- Occurrence of venous thrombosis (blood clots in a vein) in women without a family history can reveal a cancer and needs some complementary investigations.

If you would like further information about any matters discussed in this leaflet that may be effecting you, please contact Lee Tomkins by calling 01209 711 054 or emailing [leetomkinsims@btinternet.com](mailto:leetomkinsims@btinternet.com)

## International Menopause Society

The International Menopause Society (IMS) is a non-profit association and was created in 1978. It currently has members in 62 countries. In addition to organising congresses, symposia, and workshops, the IMS owns its own journal: *Climacteric*, the Journal of Adult Women's Health and Medicine.

The aims of the IMS are "to promote knowledge, study and research on all aspects of aging in men and women; to organise, prepare, hold and participate in international meetings and congresses on menopause and climacteric; and to encourage the interchange of research plans and experience between individual members."

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## Disclaimer

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