

Initiating a brief intervention

A guide for health professionals on discussing cancer risk reduction with patients - with key messages about practical actions and signposts to websites which offer further help.

Starting Points

It takes time for health professionals to talk about reducing cancer risk, but sometimes having key messages at hand can be helpful for initiating a brief intervention.

- Smoking cessation is the number one action for cancer prevention
- In non-smokers, obesity is now the highest risk factor
- For breast cancer, it is estimated that 38% of cases are related to lifestyle (excess body weight, alcohol, low levels of physical activity)
- The evidence for other lifestyle change is stacking up and current estimates show that around 47% of bowel cancer cases are due to four main modifiable behaviours (high intakes of red and processed meat, high alcohol intake, excess body weight and low levels of physical activity)

The good news is that all of these factors can be modified to decrease cancer risk.

Two minutes endorsement about lifestyle change from a health professional provides an opportunity to talk about cancer prevention messages - important when most people still think that fate, genetics and bad luck are the major causes of cancer.

Smoking

Guidance on smoking from the European Code Against Cancer is clear: Do not smoke. Do not use any form of tobacco.

Benefits of Smoking Cessation

A recent systematic review suggests that the benefits of giving up smoking are evident in all age groups, including people of 80 years and older.

Health

As with the general population, giving up smoking confers both immediate and long-term health benefits from improved blood pressure and lung function to decreased cancer and stroke risk.

Finances

The average cost of a typical pack of 20 cigarettes is £9.60 - that's about £3500 per year if you smoke 20 cigarettes a day. Patients can see how much they spend on smoking, and what they could save by stopping at www.canstopsmoking.com.

Help Available for Patients

In Pharmacies

Most pharmacies/local chemists are able to provide quit smoking advice and support.

Where appropriate, the pharmacist can identify the most suitable form of nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) and some pharmacies run NHS-funded stop smoking services. NRT is available on NHS prescription in Scotland.

By Phone

Patients can phone Smokeline for free on **0800 84 84 84** (8am to 10pm, seven days a week).

Smokeline advisors provide free advice and information for anyone who wants to stop smoking, or who wants to help someone to quit

Smokeline also provides information about the free stop smoking services provided by health boards.

Online

Patients can visit www.canstopsmoking.com and enter their postcode to find the nearest stop smoking service.

Did you know: smoking costs, conservatively, around £1.1 billion to Scotland each year.

Healthy Diet

The European Code Against Cancer recommends: Have a healthy diet: Eat plenty of whole grains, pulses, vegetables and fruits. Limit high-calorie foods (foods high in sugar or fat) and avoid sugary drinks. Avoid processed meat; limit red meat and foods high in salt.

Key Messages

No more than 500g (cooked weight) of red and processed meat per week.

Make every other evening meal free of red and processed meat.

Chicken, hummus and tuna are better sandwich options than ham, bacon or sausage.

Eat wholegrains and pulses (peas, beans, lentils) most days.

Aim for 5 a day of vegetables and fruit (one glass of fruit juice, a medium tomato, some home made veggie soup, frozen peas and banana are easy and cheap options).

Patients can visit www.takelifeon.co.uk or fss.scot for more information.

Obesity Reduction

The European Code Against Cancer says "Take action to be a healthy body weight."

Unless people play regular, serious, energetic sport, BMI > 25kg/m² is a good indication of excess fat storage in all men and women!!

A starting goal of 5% reduction in body weight for everyone with a BMI >25 is appropriate.

Even modest weight loss is associated with decreased cancer incidence, especially in women.

People who practice weight management are more likely to have been told their weight category by a health professional.

Weight loss is best achieved through reducing intake of food and drinks AND increasing physical activity.

Key Messages

Sugary drinks (including hot drinks) and regular fast food/take away meal consumption are clearly associated with weight gain.

Eating breakfast, keeping to small portion sizes and low fat dairy products are positive ways to control calorie intake.

Alcoholic drinks are a key target for weight management (one pint of beer contains around 180 calories, an average glass of wine around 170 calories).

Be active - aiming for a brisk 30 minute walk or 2 x 15 minute walk every day. Encourage taking the stairs, getting off the bus a stop early, walking at work.

Avoid prolonged sitting – an hour is too long!

Self monitoring (weighing) and recording with brief feedback (from practitioner) helps achieve sustained weight loss.

Alcohol

The European Code Against Cancer recommendation on alcohol says “If you drink alcohol of any type, limit your intake. Not drinking alcohol is better for cancer prevention.”

Key Messages

Opt for small size drinks, avoid double measures, use small wine glasses

Alternate between alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks

Aim to keep a few nights **alcohol free**

Patients can visit www.nhsinform.co.uk for more information.

Physical Activity

The European Code Against Cancer says “Be physically active in everyday life. Limit the time you spend sitting.” Physical activity in any form helps to lower cancer risk and is important even for those within normal weight range

Key Messages

10 minute brisk walking counts! Build up to 30 minutes per day and more.

Dancing, swimming, cycling, gardening all offer **opportunities to be more active.**

Encourage the use of a pedometer to set, record and achieve goals.

Patients can visit www.activescotland.org.uk for more information.

Sign up for our free quarterly newsletter and find out more at www.cancerpreventionscotland.org.uk - or follow us on Twitter (@thescpn).