

Stomach cancer

What is stomach cancer?

Stomach cancer, also known as **gastric cancer**, develops when abnormal cells grow uncontrollably in the lining of the stomach. Although it is less common in the UK compared to other types of cancer, early detection and treatment can make a significant difference in outcomes.

What causes stomach cancer?

Stomach cancer develops due to changes in the cells of the stomach lining, often influenced by a combination of risk factors. Common causes and risk factors include:

- **Helicobacter pylori (H. pylori) infection** a bacterial infection that increases the risk of stomach inflammation and ulcers
- **Diet** eating a diet high in salty, pickled, or processed foods and low in fruits and vegetables
- **Smoking** a major risk factor for stomach cancer
- **Alcohol consumption** excessive drinking can damage the stomach lining
- **Family history** a close relative with stomach cancer can increase your risk
- **Chronic gastritis** long-term inflammation of the stomach lining
- **Obesity** linked to a higher risk of several cancers, including stomach cancer
- **Certain medical conditions** such as pernicious anaemia or gastric polyps

While these factors increase your risk, it's important to remember that having one or more does not mean you will develop stomach cancer.

What are the symptoms of stomach cancer?

The early stages of stomach cancer often have no noticeable symptoms, which is why regular check-ups are essential if you're at higher risk. As the condition progresses, symptoms may include:

- Indigestion or persistent heartburn
- Feeling full quickly after eating small amounts of food
- Unexplained weight loss
- Nausea or vomiting (sometimes with blood)
- Stomach pain or discomfort
- Fatigue or weakness
- Dark, tar-like stools (a sign of internal bleeding)

If you notice these symptoms, especially if they persist or worsen, it's important to seek medical advice promptly.

When to seek urgent help

You should seek urgent medical attention if you experience:

- Severe abdominal pain
- Vomiting blood or material that looks like coffee grounds
- Unexplained weight loss
- Difficulty swallowing

How is stomach cancer diagnosed?

At Birmingham Endoscopy Clinic, we use advanced diagnostic tools to detect stomach cancer and determine the best treatment approach. Diagnostic tests may include:

- **Upper GI endoscopy** a thin, flexible tube with a camera is passed into your stomach to check for abnormalities and take a tissue sample (biopsy) if needed
- **CT or PET scans** imaging tests to assess the stomach and surrounding areas for signs of cancer spread
- **Barium swallow X-ray** a special X-ray test to examine the stomach lining and detect any irregularities
- **Blood tests** to check for signs of anaemia, infection, or tumour markers

How is stomach cancer treated?

Treatment for stomach cancer depends on the stage and location of the cancer, as well as your overall health. Options may include:

- **Endoscopic treatment** for very early-stage cancers, abnormal cells may be removed during an endoscopy
- **Surgery** to remove part or all of the stomach (gastrectomy) and nearby lymph nodes
- **Chemotherapy or radiotherapy** to shrink the tumour before surgery or destroy remaining cancer cells after surgery
- **Targeted therapies** advanced treatments that specifically target cancer cells without harming healthy cells

Your consultant will work closely with you to create a personalised treatment plan, ensuring you receive the best possible care.

Can stomach cancer be prevented?

While not all cases of stomach cancer can be prevented, there are steps you can take to reduce your risk:

- Treat H. pylori infections promptly
- Eat a balanced diet rich in fruits, vegetables, and whole grains
- Limit processed, salty, or pickled foods
- Avoid smoking and limit alcohol consumption
- Maintain a healthy weight through regular exercise and a balanced diet

If you have a family history of stomach cancer or other risk factors, regular check-ups and early screening can help detect potential issues before they become serious.

Why choose Birmingham Endoscopy Clinic?

At Birmingham Endoscopy Clinic, we are committed to providing expert care for patients with stomach cancer. With state-of-the-art diagnostic tools and a team of experienced specialists, we deliver personalised treatment plans tailored to your unique needs. Whether you need a diagnosis, treatment, or ongoing support, we are here to guide you every step of the way.

Contact us

If you have any concerns about potential symptoms or your digestive health, get in touch with Birmingham Endoscopy Clinic today to book a consultation. Early diagnosis and treatment can greatly improve outcomes and enhance your quality of life.