

# Bladder Cancer: Risk Factors



## What is a risk factor?

A risk factor is anything that may increase your chance of having a disease. Risk factors for a certain type of cancer might include smoking, diet, family history, or many other things. The exact cause of someone's cancer may not be known. But risk factors can make it more likely for a person to have cancer.

Things you should know about risk factors for cancer:

- Risk factors can increase a person's risk, but they don't always cause the disease.
- Some people with one or more risk factors never develop cancer. Other people with cancer have no known risk factors.
- Some risk factors are very well known. But there's ongoing research about risk factors for many types of cancer.

Some risk factors, such as family history, may not be in your control. But others may be things you can change. Knowing the risk factors can help you make choices that might lower your risk. For instance, if an unhealthy diet is a risk factor, you may choose to eat healthy foods. If excess weight is a risk factor, your healthcare provider may help you lose weight.

## Who is at risk for bladder cancer?

These are the risk factors for bladder cancer:

### Smoking

Smoking is the biggest risk factor for bladder cancer. People who smoke are at least 3 times more likely to get bladder cancer as those who don't. In fact, 50% of all bladder cancers are linked to smoking.

When you smoke, cancer-causing chemicals called carcinogens harm cells in your bladder. The carcinogens from smoke enter the blood through the lungs. The kidneys filter the blood to remove these carcinogens and send them into the urine. The urine goes to the bladder, where it's stored until you urinate. This causes the carcinogens to build up in the urine. They can harm the cells in your bladder. Over time, these damaged cells may turn into cancer.

The younger you were when you started smoking, and the more you smoke, the higher your risk of getting cancer. Some people think that there's no reason to quit smoking because the damage has already been done. That's not true. Quitting greatly lowers your risk for bladder and many other kinds of cancer. And the longer you don't smoke, the more your risk goes down. So it's worth the effort to do all you can to stop smoking.

### Race

Whites are twice as likely to get bladder cancer as African Americans or Hispanic Americans.

### Gender

Men get bladder cancer much more often than women.

### Age

The risk for bladder cancer goes up with age. It's rare in young people. Most people with bladder cancer are age 65 or older.

## Chemical exposure at work

Exposure to certain chemicals and dyes at work can increase your risk for bladder cancer. But these exposures are linked to only a small percentage of bladder cancers. If you work in the dye industry or as a hairdresser or truck driver, you may have been exposed to chemicals that increase your risk for bladder cancer. This may also be true if you work with rubber, textiles, leather, paint, metalwork, or printing. Talk with your employer about risk factors involving chemicals. Make sure you follow the guidelines for working with chemicals safely. If you have questions, call:

- [National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health](#) at 800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636)
- [Occupational Safety and Health Administration](#) at 800-321-OSHA (800-321-6742)

## Chronic bladder problems

Urinary tract infections and kidney and bladder stones have been linked to bladder cancer.

Using a urinary catheter for a long time has also been linked to bladder cancer.

## Certain medicines and supplements

Using the diabetes medicine pioglitazone for more than 1 year has been linked to bladder cancer.

Supplements containing Aristolochia fangchi or aristolochic acid have been linked to bladder cancer. This is an herb used in some weight-loss products.

## History of bladder cancer

If you've had bladder cancer in the past, even if it was at an early stage, you have a higher risk of getting it again.

Your risk goes up if you have a family history of bladder cancer. It also goes up if you have certain inherited genetic problems.

## Past cancer treatment

Your risk for bladder cancer may be higher if you've had a chemotherapy medicine called cyclophosphamide or radiation directed at your pelvis to treat another cancer in the past.

## Arsenic

High levels of arsenic in drinking water have been linked with a higher risk for bladder cancer. This is rare in the U.S.

## What are your risk factors?

Talk with your healthcare provider about your risk factors for bladder cancer and what you can do about them.

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