

# 7 Cancer myths BUSTED!

Forget the rumours and stop worrying – we sort the fact from the fiction

## 1 MYTH Cancer loves sugar

**THE TRUTH** This myth comes from the fact that all cells use a sugar called glucose as an energy source – and cancer cells use more than most because they're so active, explains Tom Stansfeld. 'Too much sugar in your diet won't cause cancer or make it grow faster – but it *can* cause you to gain weight, and being overweight increases the chances of many types of cancer, including two of the most common – breast and bowel – and three of the hardest to treat: pancreatic, oesophageal and gallbladder.'



## 2 MYTH The occasional cigarette won't do that much harm

**THE TRUTH** There's no safe way to use tobacco – even if you just smoke one to four cigarettes a day, you're playing Russian roulette with your health. 'On top of lung cancer, smoking is linked to at least 13 other types of cancer (including mouth, throat, bowel, cervix and ovarian cancers),' says Tom Stansfeld of Cancer Research UK. 'Whatever your age, try to give up – even lifelong smokers who quit in their 60s can gain valuable years of life.' Find help at [quitnow.smokefree.nhs.uk](http://quitnow.smokefree.nhs.uk), or talk to your GP or pharmacist.



## 3

### MYTH A tight bra causes breast cancer

**THE TRUTH** This myth started in the 90s when the book *Dressed To Kill* claimed that tight or underwired bras inhibit the lymphatic system, causing a build-up of toxins in breast tissue. The claim has always been dismissed by experts, but was finally laid to rest last year in a study by the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center in Seattle. If your bra's tight, could your weight be to blame? 'Being overweight is a risk,' says Eluned Hughes of Breakthrough Breast Cancer. 'Just 30 minutes' exercise a day is proven to help keep weight down and reduce your risk of breast cancer.'



50% of us will get cancer – mainly because we're living longer. 'Most cancer is caused by damage to DNA that builds over time, so is more common in older people,' says Tom Stansfeld

## 4

### MYTH You're more at risk if it's in your family

**THE TRUTH** Only 5-10% of cancers are caused by inherited genes, while 40% are caused by lifestyle choices,' says Tom Stansfeld. The higher your BMI after menopause, the higher your risk of breast cancer. Having a BMI over 30 leads to three extra 50-plus women out of every 100 developing breast cancer. You're also 2% more likely to develop breast cancer if you have just one alcoholic drink daily (eg. a 175ml glass of wine) than if you don't drink at all.

## 5 MYTH Dying your hair can cause cancer

**THE TRUTH** Though there's never been any proof that having your hair dyed is a cancer hazard, people who work as hairdressers seem to have a slightly higher than average risk of bladder cancer. 'This could be because cancer takes a long time to develop and the cases we're seeing now could have been caused by frequent exposure to harmful ingredients that were banned in the 1970s,' says Tom Stansfeld. 'Further substances were banned by the EU in 2006, so today's hairdressers should be safer. Smoking is a far greater risk, causing over a third of UK bladder cancer cases.'



## 6 MYTH Water drunk from a plastic bottle that's been left in a hot car is a cancer risk

**THE TRUTH** In 2002, a Japanese TV show broadcast a theory that plastic water bottles were unsafe. The claims have since been discredited by Cancer Research UK and the main chemical thought to be a cancer risk – BPA (bisphenol A) – has been ruled out as a carcinogen by both the World Health Organisation and the European Food Safety Authority. Most (95%) bottled water is packaged in PET (Polyethylene Terephthalate) plastic, which doesn't even contain BPA. Plastics with the recycle code 1,2,4,5 or 6 are BPA free. PET plastic is code 1. Some, but not all, plastics marked with codes 3 or 7 may be made with BPA.



## 7 MYTH Smaller boobs means you have a lower risk of breast cancer

**THE TRUTH** Breast size has no impact whatsoever on cancer risk, says Eluned Hughes. 'Small-chested women have the same number of lobes and ducts (the parts that make milk and carry it to the nipple) as bustier women, and cancer usually starts in the cells that line these. We urge *all* women to be breast aware and get to know what's normal for them, by regularly looking at, touching and checking their breasts.' It's not only women who are affected, about 400 men a year in the UK are diagnosed with breast cancer – usually behind the nipple or areola.

