**Oesophageal Cancer Fact Sheet**

In Northern Ireland, around 218 people are diagnosed with oesophageal cancer each year, with many diagnosed at a later stage. It mainly affects people in their 60s and 70s, and is more common in men than women.

**The oesophagus**

The oesophagus is the long tube (food pipe or gullet) that carries food from the throat to the stomach.

**Risk factors**

* Persistent acid reflux (gastro-oesophageal reflux disease GORD)
* Smoking
* Drinking too much over many years
* Being overweight
* Having an unhealthy diet that’s low in fruit and vegetables

**Symptoms**

**Oesophageal cancer does not usually have any symptoms at first but as the cancer grows it can cause symptoms.**

* Difficulty swallowing - the cancer can narrow the oesophagus, making it difficult for food to pass down
* Persistent indigestion or heartburn
* Bringing up food soon after eating
* Loss of appetite and weight loss
* Persistent vomiting
* Pain or discomfort in your upper tummy, chest or back
* Persistent cough
* Hoarseness
* Tiredness, shortness of breath and pale skin
* Vomiting blood or coughing up blood (although this is uncommon)

Gastro-oesophageal reflux disease (GORD) is where a weakness in the muscles above the stomach means stomach acid can travel up into the oesophagus. In around 1 in 10 people with GORD, repeated damage from stomach acid over many years can eventually cause changes in the cells lining the oesophagus. This is called Barrett's oesophagus. These abnormal cells are at an increased risk of becoming cancerous in the future, with between 1 and 5 people out of 100 with Barrett's oesophagus going on to get oesophageal cancer.

If you have any of these symptoms it is important to seek advice from your doctor - early detection can save your life.

**How can you reduce your risk?**

* Don’t start smoking, or stop if you already do. For more information [www.stopsmokingni.info](http://www.stopsmokingni.info)
* If you drink alcohol, limit your intake. However, not drinking alcohol is better
* Maintain a healthy weight
* Have a healthy diet

If you have any concerns contact our Nurse Line on 0800 783 3339