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# Nasopharyngeal Cancer Causes, Risk Factors, and Prevention

Learn about the risk factors for nasopharyngeal cancer and what you might be able to do to help lower your risk.

## Risk Factors

A risk factor is anything that raises your chance of getting a disease such as cancer. Learn more about the risk factors for nasopharyngeal cancer.

- [Risk Factors for Nasopharyngeal Cancer](#)
- [What Causes Nasopharyngeal Cancer?](#)

## Prevention

There's no way to prevent all nasopharyngeal cancers. But there are things you can do that might help lower your risk. Learn more.

- [Can Nasopharyngeal Cancer Be Prevented?](#)

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# Risk Factors for Nasopharyngeal Cancer



common, typically eat diets very high in salt-cured fish and meat starting at an early age. The process of cooking the salted food seems to make chemicals, such as [nitrosamine](#)<sup>1</sup>, which is a probable carcinogen. The rate of this cancer is dropping in southeast China and Singapore and it might partly be from people eating less of the salted fish. In contrast, some studies have suggested that diets high in nuts, legumes, fruits, and vegetables and low in dairy products and meat may help lower the risk of NPC.

## Age

In areas of the world where NPC is not common, older age is a risk factor.

In places where NPC is more common, the cancer tends to be seen in younger people. For example, about 1 in 5 people with NPC are younger than 30 years old and the number of people diagnosed with NPC starts to go down after about age 59.

## Epstein-Barr virus infection

Infection with [1 72 494.9yHyET BT 1 0 0 1nut](#) RG 0.75 w 165.38 426e bee8V7(EBV8f 0 1nutk6S S S

Some research shows that certain high-risk types of HPV may be linked to a small group of NPC cases especially in younger people who don't smoke.

See [HPV \(human papillomavirus\)](#)<sup>4</sup> to learn more about HPV and vaccines to prevent HPV infection.

## **Family history**

Family members of people with NPC are more likely to get this cancer. It's not known if this is because of inherited genes, shared environmental factors (such as the same diet or living quarters), or some combination of these.

Just as people have different blood types, they also have different tissue types. Studies have found that people with certain inherited tissue types have an increased risk of developing NPC. Tissue types affect immune responses, so this may be related to how a person's body reacts to EBV infection.

## **Other possible risk factors**

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## **What Causes Nasopharyngeal Cancer?**



National Cancer Institute. Nasopharyngeal Cancer Treatment (Adult) (PDQ)—Patient Version. July 22, 2021. Accessed at [www.cancer.gov/types/head-and-neck/patient/adult/nasopharyngeal-treatment-pdq](http://www.cancer.gov/types/head-and-neck/patient/adult/nasopharyngeal-treatment-pdq) on April 26, 2022.

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## Can Nasopharyngeal Cancer Be Prevented?

- [Avoid tobacco and alcohol](#)
- [Avoid certain infections](#)
- [Avoid certain foods](#)

There's no sure way to prevent nasopharyngeal cancer (NPC). But there are some things you can do that might lower your risk of getting NPC and other types of cancers.

### **Avoid tobacco and alcohol**



vaccine and trying to avoid HPV infection might help prevent NPC and some forms of cancer, including cancers of the penis, cervix, vulva, vagina, anus, mouth, and throat.

See [HPV \(human papillomavirus\)](#)<sup>3</sup> to learn more about HPV and vaccines to prevent HPV infection.

## **Avoid certain foods**

Because eating certain types of foods, such as diets high in salt-cured fish, have been linked with NPC risk, eating less or not eating some types of food may lower the risk. This is especially true in parts of the world where NPC is common, such as southern China, northern Africa, and the Arctic region. Descendants of Southeast Asians who immigrated to the United States and eat a typical American diet, for example, have a lower risk of developing NPC. But these dietary factors are not thought to account for all cases of NPC in most other parts of the world.

## **Hyperlinks**

1. [www.cancer.org/cancer/risk-prevention/tobacco.html](http://www.cancer.org/cancer/risk-prevention/tobacco.html)
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