

What should I do if I'm worried about cancer?



If you're worried about cancer, informing yourself about what to look out for, attending cancer screening when you're invited, and getting checked by your GP when you have a concern is the best course of action.

Signs and symptoms

Early detection of cancer saves lives, so it's crucial to tell your doctor if you notice anything that's unusual for you.

There's no need to remember all the symptoms of cancer. Pay attention to your body and seek medical advice if you notice anything that's not normal for you.

You're not wasting anyone's time getting symptoms checked. Although symptoms can often be caused by conditions other than cancer, if it is cancer, catching it at an earlier stage can significantly improve outcomes, as treatment is more likely to be successful.



General cancer symptoms

Contact your GP about any of these symptoms if they are unusual for you, you've been having them for a long time, or they are unexplained:

- Very heavy night sweats or fever
- Fatigue
- Unexplained bleeding or bruising
- Unexplained pain or ache
- Unexplained weight loss/gain
- Unusual lump or swelling anywhere that does not change
- Cough or hoarse voice
- Breathing problems
- Breast or nipple changes
- Bowel changes, such as diarrhoea/constipation, or blood in the stool
- Problems urinating, or increased frequency of urination
- Sores or ulcers that don't heal after 3 weeks
- Skin changes including changes in moles or raised lumps

Cancer screening programmes

Cancer screening programmes are designed for people without symptoms. Screening can detect cancers at an early stage. If you are invited to cancer screening, it's important to attend.

You can find out more about cancer screening here: <https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/screening>

Remember: even if you've had screening, it's still important to contact your GP if you have any unusual changes to your health.

Cancer risk factors

In many instances, we don't know why one person develops cancer, when someone else doesn't.

There are some general risk factors for developing cancer, and some that increase the risk of developing specific cancer types.

Having a risk factor, or more than one risk factor, doesn't guarantee you'll develop cancer. Some risk factors only marginally increase your risk, whereas others like smoking significantly increase your risk. It's possible to get cancer even without any known risk factors.

General risk factors

- Age – the risk increases as you get older
- Lifestyle factors – these include smoking, your weight, your diet, how active you are, sun exposure and sunbed use, and how much alcohol you drink.
- Family history – certain cancers are more common in some families.

What to do if you're concerned

Always get advice from your GP, Nurse or Consultant if you have symptoms that are ongoing, unexplained or unusual.

Never feel you are wasting anyone's time, if you are concerned then it is worth checking it out. You are not wasting anyone's time; they are there to help.

