

7 common cancer symptoms you shouldn't ignore



One in two Britons born after 1960 will be diagnosed with some form of cancer during their lifetime.¹

Cancer Research UK states that women have the highest lifetime risk of breast, lung and bowel cancers with men having the highest lifetime risk of prostate, lung and bowel cancers.²

The National Audit Office has estimated that there have been 740,000 less urgent cancer referrals since the start of lockdown — with as many as 60,000 people with missed cancers, but the majority remain undiagnosed, to put this figure into perspective, these people would fill a large football stadium. This is a sobering thought and brings into focus how important it is to be aware of early cancer symptoms, what you should look out for and what you shouldn't ignore.

With all cancers, early diagnosis is a key factor in survival rates. Cancer screening is designed to detect cancers before symptoms appear, and when cancer is diagnosed early, treatment is often easier and more successful.

In this blog we are going to explore seven typical cancer symptoms that you should be aware of which cover the six most common cancers in the UK.

1 Weight/Appetite loss

Half of people who have cancer lose weight, it's often one of the first signs that people notice. If you have unexplained weight loss which cannot be attributed to changes in your diet, exercise, or stress then this can be an early sign of cancer or due to other health problems.

2 Fatigue

We all have times when we cannot keep our eyes open at our desks and a lot of us lead demanding lifestyles in which we do not get enough sleep, so it is understandable that you are going to feel tired. However, if you are suffering unusual exhaustion that has been going on for a while, it could be due to other factors. Fatigue can be a red flag of an early symptom of cancer and should be investigated.

3 Unusual bleeding and problems peeing

If you experience any unusual vaginal bleeding such as bleeding after sex or between periods or new bleeding after you have been through the menopause then these can indicate symptoms of cervical cancer.

If you are male and experience blood in your pee or semen then this can be a symptom of prostate cancer.

It is important that if you are experiencing any of these symptoms and especially if they are new, unusual and do not go away that you get them checked out as soon as possible.

Common symptoms of cervical cancer can be found [here](#) >
Common signs of prostate cancer can be found [here](#) >

4 Coughing up blood (phlegm with blood in it) and aches or pains when breathing or coughing

Coughing up blood or phlegm with blood spots in it is a symptom that should be addressed immediately. It could be a sign of lung cancer and signals that there may be another serious underlying medical condition and you should get this symptom checked out by your GP.

Chest pain is a common symptom of lung cancer. If you are experiencing a persistent pain in the chest that doesn't seem to go away when you lift something, cough or laugh then you need to get this seen too.

For further information on common lung cancer symptoms, click [here](#) >

5 Changes in your bowel habit

If you have experienced recent changes in your bowel habit that have lasted longer than six weeks then you need to get these symptoms investigated. Signs and symptoms of early bowel cancer can show as blood in your stools (poo) or bleeding from your bottom, an increase in the frequency of passing stools, the loosening or hardening of the stool, for example, diarrhoea or constipation. Anything that seems unusual or not your usual 'normal' should be further investigated to rule out a possible cancer diagnosis.

Take a look at our blog on 'What are the symptoms of bowel cancer' [here](#) >

6 Unexplained lumps and changes in your breasts

At Check4Cancer we advocate being breast aware and encourage women to regularly check their breasts, so you become familiar with what your 'normal' is. This gets you into the habit of becoming familiar with your breasts, so if you notice anything that does not belong to you, it needs to get checked out to rule out a possible cancer diagnosis. Signs to look for include unusual changes in the breast shape, size or skin colour, any new lumps in the breast or armpit or any unusual changes to the nipple or nipple discharge.

You can view our handy guide to performing a breast self-examination in 6 steps [here](#) >

7 Changes to your moles

You may have some moles or dark patches on your skin that are flat or slightly raised, usually, these will remain harmless all your life. However, moles or localised patches of normal skin that change in size, shape or colour over weeks or months in adult life need to be further investigated.

There are some obvious signs that a mole could be a melanoma and you should get your moles checked by your GP or a skin cancer specialist if you notice any of the following skin changes:

- Changing shape, particularly if it has an irregular outline
- Changing colour, getting darker, becoming patchy or multi-shaded
- An existing mole getting bigger or a new mole growing quickly
- If a mole starts to itch or become painful
- If a mole is bleeding, becoming crusty and/or looks inflamed

Take a look at our guide on how to spot early signs of skin cancer with simple skin checks [here](#).

Early detection and screening for cancer has never been so important. Check4Cancer offers a range of cancer screening tests which cover the six most common cancers in the UK which are breast, bowel, cervical, lung, prostate and skin cancers [here](#) >

Sources

ⁱ <https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/health-professional/cancer-statistics/risk#heading-Zero>

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