



CANCER  
RESEARCH  
UK

**SPOTTING  
THE SIGNS  
OF CANCER**  
FOR WOMEN



**YOUR  
CANCER  
GUIDE**

Thousands of people survive cancer every year. When cancer is diagnosed at an early stage, treatment is more likely to be successful. So finding cancer early can make a real difference.

Almost 1 in 2 women in the UK will develop cancer at some point in their lives. The disease is more common in older people, with almost half of cancer cases in women being diagnosed at age 70 and over.

**In this leaflet you can find out about:**

- some key signs and symptoms women should look out for
- why it's important to get these symptoms checked out by a doctor
- screening tests for cancer



## Why is spotting cancer early so important?

Spotting cancer early, and getting treated, gives you a better chance of beating the disease.

The chance of survival is better when cancer is diagnosed at an early stage.

Cancer survival in the UK has doubled in the last 40 years. This is mainly because of better treatments, screening and earlier diagnosis. But thousands more lives could be saved each year if we improved early diagnosis and treatment even further.

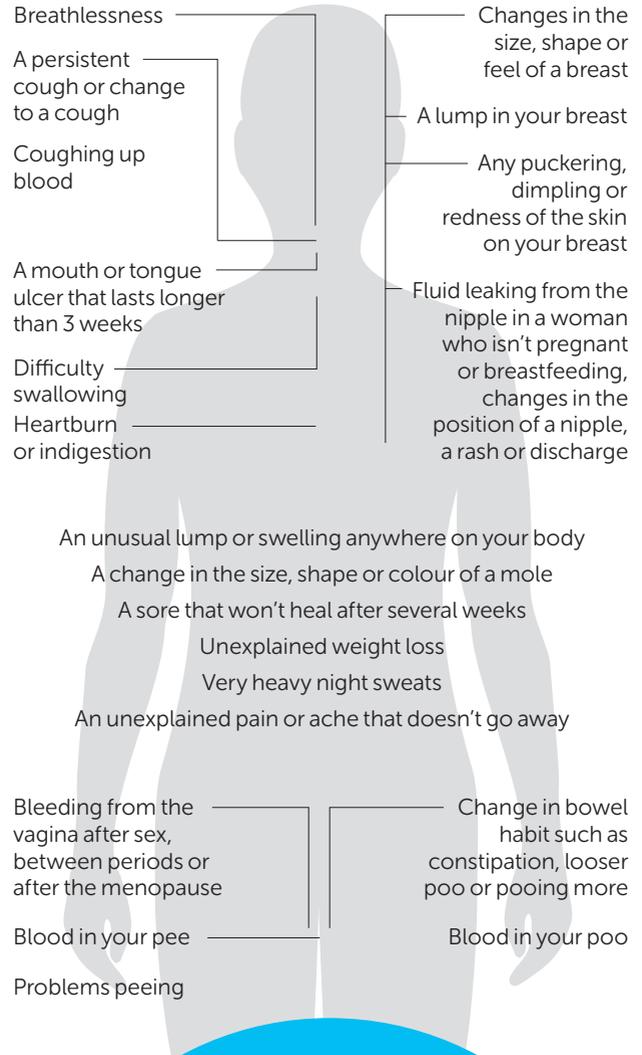
## Cancer signs and symptoms

There are more than 200 different types of cancer, which can cause many different symptoms. The changes listed in this leaflet are some of the most important to look out for and act on.

It's also a good idea to get to know your body and what's normal for you. This will make it easier for you to spot any changes that are unusual or don't go away and should be checked out by a doctor.

Today more people than ever are surviving cancer.

## What should you look out for?



Breathlessness

A persistent cough or change to a cough

Coughing up blood

A mouth or tongue ulcer that lasts longer than 3 weeks

Difficulty swallowing

Heartburn or indigestion

Changes in the size, shape or feel of a breast

A lump in your breast

Any puckering, dimpling or redness of the skin on your breast

Fluid leaking from the nipple in a woman who isn't pregnant or breastfeeding, changes in the position of a nipple, a rash or discharge

An unusual lump or swelling anywhere on your body

A change in the size, shape or colour of a mole

A sore that won't heal after several weeks

Unexplained weight loss

Very heavy night sweats

An unexplained pain or ache that doesn't go away

Bleeding from the vagina after sex, between periods or after the menopause

Change in bowel habit such as constipation, looser poo or pooing more

Blood in your pee

Blood in your poo

Problems peeing

## Do any of these apply to you?

They're most likely to be caused by something much less serious than cancer, but it's worth getting checked out by your doctor. You could take this leaflet with you to explain why you're there.



**JUST  
TELL  
YOUR  
DOCTOR**

## **Common concerns**

### **? I find it difficult to make an appointment**

It's important to get checked out if you notice something that's not normal for you. You may be able to book appointments online and many doctors have extended opening hours on weekdays or at weekends. You could also ask for a telephone consultation if you're finding it difficult to go to the surgery.

### **? I don't want to tell the receptionist my symptoms**

When you ask for an appointment, the receptionist might ask you about your symptoms, but that's just so they make sure you see the right person. You don't have to tell the receptionist what you want to see the doctor about if you don't want to.

### **? I've already seen the doctor about my symptoms and I don't want to bother him/her again**

If your symptoms haven't gone away, have changed or have got worse, your doctor will want to know. Be stubborn if your symptom is stubborn.

## **Cancer screening**

Cancer screening is for healthy people without symptoms and aims to prevent or find cancer at an early stage when the chances of successful treatment are higher. You need to be registered with a GP to be invited. Screening has harms as well as benefits, so you should read the information with your invite to help you decide if you would like to take part.

## **Breast cancer screening (mammography)**

In the UK, all women eligible for breast screening will receive invitations from age 50-70. In England, this is being extended to women aged 47-73. If you are over 70 and would like to be screened, speak to your doctor or breast screening unit.

## **Cervical screening (the smear test)**

As well as aiming to detect cancers at an early stage, cervical screening can prevent cancer by finding changes before they develop into cancer. Women are invited every 3 to 5 years from 25-64.

## **Bowel cancer screening**

Bowel screening with a testing kit looks for hidden traces of blood in your poo. This can be a sign of bowel cancer, or changes that could develop into cancer. When you reach the right age, you will receive a screening kit to do the test at home.

In England a new screening test called bowel scope has started to be introduced. This uses a tiny camera on the end of a flexible tube to look for growths.

“Spotting cancer early means that I am now living life to the full.”



**Julia Farrell**  
**Breast cancer survivor**

.....

“I noticed a lump in my breast and went to see my doctor the very next day. Within a week I was having tests and scans and I then started treatment right away.

I am now living life to the full and enjoying the things I love to do like pottering round the garden and spending time with my family.”

**Tips for visiting your doctor:**

- Take a notebook
- Write down what you want to say
- Think about what’s been happening, how long it’s been going on for, and how often. Make sure you include everything even if you think it’s not serious or related (such as if you’ve been feeling more tired or have lost weight).

## Further information

For more about the signs and symptoms of cancer visit [www.cruk.org/spotcancerearly](http://www.cruk.org/spotcancerearly)

For more about cancer visit our patient information website:

[www.cruk.org/about-cancer](http://www.cruk.org/about-cancer)

Find out more about how to reduce the risk of cancer at [www.cruk.org/prevent](http://www.cruk.org/prevent)

If you want to talk in confidence about cancer, call our information nurses on freephone **0808 800 4040**, Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm.

All our leaflets are thoroughly researched and based on the most up-to-date scientific evidence. They are reviewed externally by independent experts and updated regularly. You can order our full range of leaflets free online at [www.cruk.org/leaflets](http://www.cruk.org/leaflets)

## About Cancer Research UK

We pioneer life-saving research to bring forward the day when all cancers are cured. From our volunteers and supporters to our scientists, doctors and nurses, we're here right now to save more lives and prevent, control and cure all cancers.

Let's beat cancer sooner.

Join the fight now, call **0300 123 1861**  
or visit our website [www.cruk.org](http://www.cruk.org)