

Men's health: cancer awareness



Talking about cancer can feel daunting, but knowing the signs and when to seek help can make a big difference. Many cancers are treatable if found early, and often symptoms turn out to be caused by something less serious – but it's always worth checking.

Prostate cancer

Prostate cancer is the most common cancer in men in the UK, and it often develops slowly with no obvious signs for years.

Symptoms to look out for include:

- An increased need to pee (often during the night).
- Straining or taking a long time while you pee.
- Having a weak flow.
- A feeling that your bladder has not fully emptied.
- Blood in your urine or semen.

These symptoms don't always mean prostate cancer – they are more commonly linked to conditions such as an enlarged prostate – but they should never be ignored. If you notice changes, speak to your GP.

Risk factors include being over 50, having a family history of prostate cancer, being of African or African-Caribbean heritage, or being overweight.

There is no single test for prostate cancer, but your GP will advise on the best course of action. This may include a urine sample, a [PSA test](#), or they may carry out a [digital rectal examination \(DRE\)](#).

Lung cancer

Lung cancer is another of the most common cancers in men. Around 1 in 8 men will be diagnosed in their lifetime, mostly over the age of 50.

Symptoms to look out for include:

- A long-standing cough that gets worse, or a cough that doesn't go away after three weeks.
- Chest infections that keep returning.
- Coughing up blood.
- An ache/pain when breathing or coughing.
- Persistent breathlessness.
- Unexplained weight loss or loss of appetite.
- Persistent tiredness or lack of energy.

The biggest risk factor is smoking – which is responsible for around 4 in 5 lung cancer cases – but air pollution and exposure to dusts or fumes at work can also play a role. Early diagnosis is vital, so don't ignore symptoms.

Bowel cancer

Bowel cancer is the fourth most common cancer in the UK and the second biggest cause of cancer deaths. Around 1 in 15 men will be diagnosed with it in their lifetime.

Symptoms to look out for include:

- Bleeding from your bottom or blood in your stool (without other obvious causes like piles).
- Persistent changes in bowel habits (e.g. looser stools, going more often).



- Ongoing tummy pain, or a lump in your tummy.
- Unexplained weight loss or extreme tiredness for no obvious reason.

It's natural to feel uncomfortable talking about bowel habits, but your GP will be used to having these conversations every day. Most people with these symptoms don't have bowel cancer, but it's always safest to get checked.

If caught early, bowel cancer is highly treatable.

Reducing your risk

While some risk factors (like age and family history) can't be changed, there are steps that can lower your chances of developing cancer and improve your overall wellbeing:

- **Eat well** - Choose a diet rich in fruit, vegetables, and fibre. Cut back on red and processed meats.
- **Stay active and maintain a healthy weight** - This supports your long-term health, including your bones and joints.
- **Stop smoking** - This is the single most important thing you can do to support your overall health and reduce risk of developing cancers.
- **Manage any alcohol intake** - Try to stay within the recommended limits - no more than 14 units spread across three or more days - and aim for alcohol-free days during the week.
- **Take part in NHS screening:**

Bowel cancer screening - this is offered to people aged 50–74. It's a simple home test that checks for blood in your stool. If you're not yet eligible for screening but are worried about symptoms, make an appointment with your GP as they may still offer you a testing kit to do it home.

Prostate cancer - although currently there is no screening programme in the UK, men over 50 (or younger if at higher risk) can request a PSA test after discussing pros and cons with their GP.

- **Utilise any services through your employer** - Your employer may offer additional wellbeing services such as health checks or access to risk assessment tools.

Summary

The most important message to take away is that **if you notice something unusual for your body, don't put it off - get it checked**. Even if it turns out to be nothing, you'll have peace of mind. And if it is something, the sooner it's found, the better the outcome is likely to be.

Further support

Prostate Cancer UK - Information and support.

You can raise any queries with a specialist nurse by calling their helpline on **0800 074 8383** Monday to Friday, 9am–5pm (Wednesday: 10am–5pm).

Asthma + Lung UK - Supportive resources and a helpline you can call on **0300 222 5800** (Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm).

Bowel Cancer UK - Resources and guidance, including information about campaigns to get involved with.

Macmillan - The UK'S leading cancer support charity - with information on work and cancer, and cancer and employment rights.

Cancer Research UK - Hub of information and support.

Resources:

- *Bowel Cancer UK* - www.youtube.com/watch?v=4zKZQAmDYt8
- www.nhs.uk

