

10 most common cancers in males and their symptoms

Knowing the symptoms of cancer could save your life. In this guide, we'll walk you through the ten most common cancers found in males in the UK, and familiarise you with their symptoms so you know what to look out for.

Prostate cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer in males, accounting for more than a quarter (27%) of male cases, or 52,254 each year. This is followed by lung cancer (25,284) and bowel cancer (23,878). Together, prostate, lung and bowel cancers account for more than half (53%) of all new cases of cancer in males in the UK.

After that, the most common male cancers include head and neck (85,62), kidney (8,407), melanoma – skin (8,384), Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma (7,846), bladder (7,471), oesophageal (6,428), and Leukaemia (5,936).

Screening concerns for transgender or non-binary people



If you have been through gender reassignment surgery, or you identify as non-binary (or both) and are unsure about how this may affect your need for cancer screening, [please visit the link at the end of this document.](#)

Prostate cancer

In the early stages, prostate cancer does not always cause symptoms. Sometimes men may have a sensation of incomplete emptying of the bladder, or a feeling of fullness in the rectum; this can also be caused by a non-cancerous swelling of the prostate, known as benign prostatic hyperplasia or BPH, which can happen with age or infection.

BPH is when the prostate swells for non-cancerous reasons, and can cause the following symptoms:

- Difficulty passing urine – this includes a weaker flow, not emptying your bladder completely, and straining when starting to empty your bladder



- The need to pass urine more often during the day or night (nocturia)
- Leaking after you pee
- Needing to pass urine urgently

Most common symptoms of prostate cancer

Often, early prostate cancer gets picked up because of a blood test the GP may do, called a PSA (Prostate Stimulating Antigen).

Men with early prostate cancer will often have little or no symptoms because of the way the cancer grows. Symptoms of prostate cancer generally start when the cancer is pressing on the urethra (water pipe); this can cause irritation and the need to pee more often. But because prostate cancer usually starts to grow in the outer part of the prostate, early prostate cancer doesn't often press on the urethra and cause symptoms.

If the prostate cancer grows outside of the prostate gland, it will be called either locally advanced or advanced prostate cancer depending on how far it has grown. You may experience the following symptoms:

- Back pain, hip pain or pelvic pain
- Problems getting or keeping an erection
- Blood in the urine or semen
- Unexplained weight loss
- Tiredness or fatigue

These symptoms can indicate an array of other medical conditions, and are not always indicative of cancer. However, it's vitally important to be properly assessed by your GP when potential symptoms present.

Bladder cancer

Your bladder is a hollow organ in the lower part of your tummy (abdomen) called the pelvis: the bladder collects and stores your wee (urine).

Bladder cancer is when abnormal cells in the bladder lining start to grow and divide in an uncontrolled way. Most bladder cancers start in the inner lining of the bladder, also known as the transitional epithelium, or the urothelium. This lining is made up of cells called transitional (urothelial) cells. Cancers that start in these cells are called transitional cell bladder cancers, but Doctors also call them urothelial cancers.

There are rare types of bladder cancer that start in different types of cell in the bladder, but transitional (urothelial) cell bladder cancers are the most common type of bladder cancer.

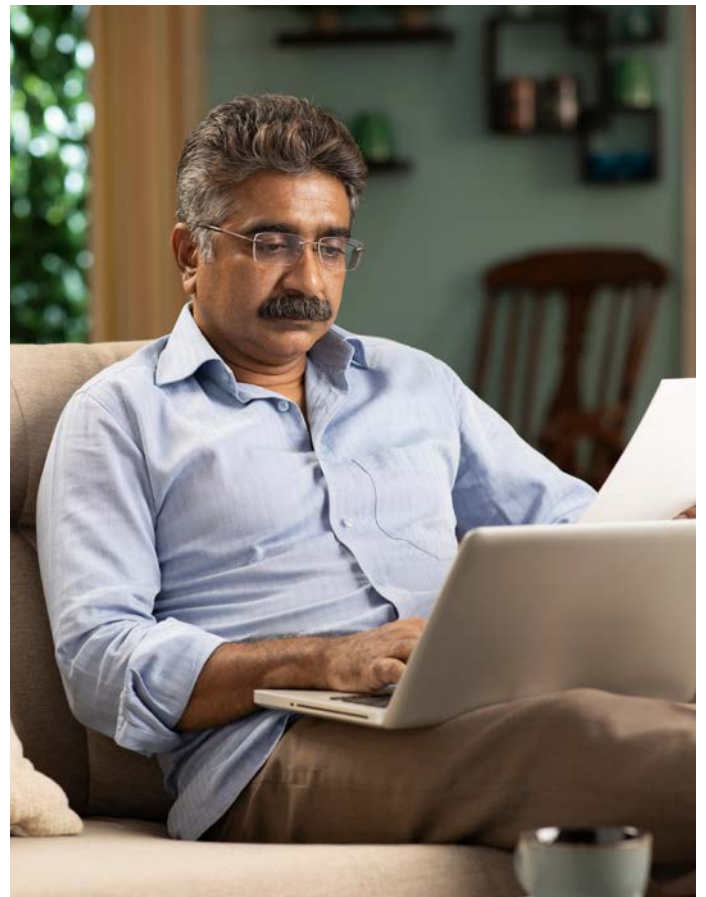
Most common symptoms of bladder cancer

- Passing urine very often (frequency)
- Passing urine very suddenly (urgency)
- Pain or a burning sensation when passing urine

Other symptoms include:

- Unexplained weight loss
- Pain in your back, lower tummy or bones
- Feeling tired and unwell

If you notice any symptoms or changes that you're at all concerned about, [get checked by your GP as soon as possible.](#)



Head and neck cancer

The term head and neck cancer covers around 10 different cancers in this area. These cancers start in the tissues in the head and neck, and include:

- Cancer of the larynx
- Mouth or oropharyngeal cancer – including the lips, gums and soft palate
- Nasal and paranasal sinus cancer (the air-filled spaces in the bones of the face)
- Nasopharyngeal cancer
- Oesophageal cancer
- Salivary gland cancer
- Throat cancer – the pharynx, the nasopharynx and the hypopharynx
- Tongue cancer
- Tonsil cancer
- Ear cancer in the middle ear, which contains the eardrum

Common symptoms of head and neck cancer

The symptoms you may experience will depend on where the cancer started. Some symptoms include having:

- A non-healing ulcer in the mouth for more than three weeks
- Red or white patches in the mouth

Other symptoms that do not go away, such as:

- A lump in the neck, on the lip or inside the mouth
- A sore tongue
- A sore throat or earache that does not improve
- Hoarseness
- Problems swallowing
- Unexplained pain or bleeding from the nose or mouth

If you notice any symptoms or changes that you're at all concerned about, [get checked by your GP as soon as possible.](#)



Bowel cancer

The bowel makes up part of the digestive system, and is split into the small and large bowel. The large bowel includes the colon, back passage (rectum) and bowel opening (anus). Bowel cancer, colorectal cancer, or colon cancer is cancer that's found in the colon.

The colon is the first part of the large bowel, and is approximately five feet long and divided into the following four sections:

- > **Ascending colon:** this runs up the right side of the abdomen and is connected to the small intestine by a section of the bowel called the caecum.
- > **Transverse colon:** this runs across the body from right to left, under the stomach.
- > **Descending colon:** this runs down the left side of the abdomen.
- > **Sigmoid colon:** this is an 'S' shaped bend that joins the descending colon to the back passage.

Cancer can develop in any part of the bowel. If the cancer spreads from the bowel it is called metastatic disease. The cancer can spread through the lymphatic system (a series of lymph nodes that run all over the body and help with the immune system), usually via the lymph nodes in the stomach or tummy, or through the blood vessels. The common areas for bowel cancer to spread to are the liver, stomach and bones.

Screening



There is a national screening programme which currently runs for eligible adults aged 60-74, but this is soon to be lowered to include 55-59 year olds. When it's time for your screening you'll receive a package through the post; you just need to put a small amount of your poo in a pot and send it back in the package provided. It's very clean and simple.

Common symptoms of bowel cancer

- > Changes in your bowel habits
- > Increasing diarrhoea
- > Increasing constipation
- > A lump in your back passage that a doctor may feel on examination

- > Blood in your poo
- > A lump in your tummy (commonly on the right side) that a doctor may feel on examination
- > Unexplained weight loss
- > Pain in your back passage
- > Tiredness or fatigue
- > Breathlessness caused by anaemia (lower level of red blood cells)

If you notice any symptoms or changes that you're at all concerned about, get checked by your GP as soon as possible.

Bowel obstruction

Sometimes cancer can block the bowel. This is called a bowel obstruction, and symptoms include:

- > Cramping pains in the abdomen
- > Feeling bloated
- > Constipation and being unable to pass wind
- > Being sick

A bowel obstruction is an emergency. You should see your doctor immediately, or go to your nearest A&E department if you think you have a bowel obstruction.



Kidney cancer

The kidneys form part of the urinary tract; we usually have two of them situated in the stomach area (tummy) towards the back of the body, on either side of the spine (backbone) and just underneath the back of the ribcage. The kidneys filter our blood and keep any nutrients our bodies need. The rest is sent down a tube to the bladder where we pee out the unwanted toxins.

There are several different types of kidney cancer. The most common are renal cell cancers or renal cell carcinomas (RCC): these start in the cortex of the kidney. The most common type is called a clear cell renal cancer. Less common types include papillary renal cell cancer and chromophobe renal cell cancer.

Common symptoms of kidney cancer

- > Blood in your pee
- > A dull ache in the top of your tummy radiating around to your back
- > The feeling of a lump in your back or side
- > Feeling tired or fatigued
- > Unexplained weight loss
- > Loss of appetite

If you notice any symptoms or changes that you're at all concerned about, get checked by your GP as soon as possible.

Skin cancer

The skin is the largest organ of the body, and performs several jobs – from protecting our insides and keeping our body temperature stable, to getting rid of body waste through sweat and making vitamin D to maintain our bones.

There are three main types of skin cancer: basal cell carcinoma (BCC), squamous cell carcinoma and malignant melanoma. The average age for melanoma diagnosis is between 85-89 years of age, but it can affect younger people too. BCC is the most common type of non-malignant melanoma skin cancer – accounting for around 75%, while squamous cell carcinoma accounts for 23%.

Most skin cancers are caused by exposure to the sun. People with a history of sunburn or overexposure to the sun in childhood also have a greater risk of developing both basal cell carcinoma and squamous cell carcinoma.

Common symptoms of skin cancer

- > A lesion or mole that has changed over time, or has rapidly appeared. Melanomas can form in other parts of your body such as the eyes, mouth, genitals and anal area, but these are much less common than melanoma of the skin.
- > Patches of skin that crack and bleed and do not heal.

If you notice any symptoms or changes that you're at all concerned about, get checked by your GP as soon as possible.



Non-Hodgkin Lymphoma

Lymphoma is a cancer of the lymphatic system – the system that helps to protect us from infections and disease through chains of vessels that join to our lymph nodes. These spring into action when they detect infection and produce infection-fighting cells.

There are also lymphatic organs called the thymus, the tonsils, and the spleen: each has its own function to help fight infection.

There are more than 60 types of Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma. Some types of Lymphoma are slow growing and may not need treatment straight away.

Common symptoms of Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma

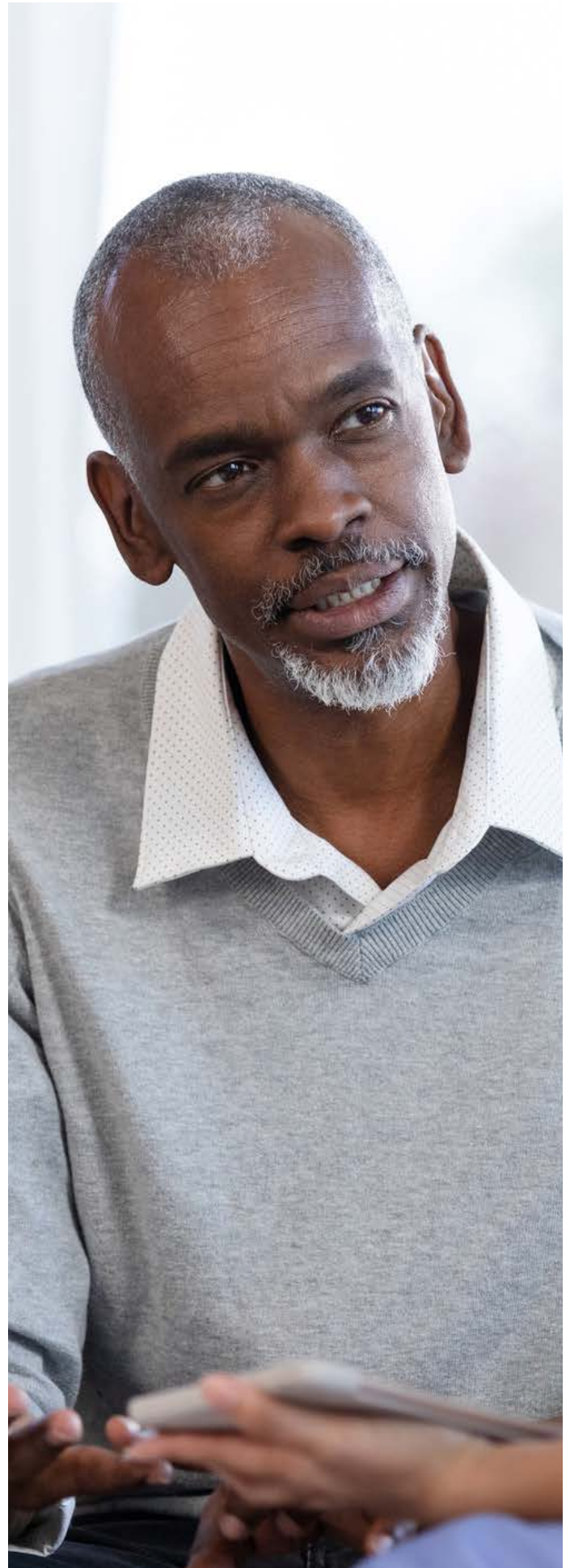
Local symptoms:

- If the lymphoma is in the chest area, symptoms include a cough, difficulty swallowing or breathlessness.
- If the lymphoma is in the stomach or bowel, symptoms include indigestion, tummy pain or weight loss.
- Occasionally pain can be caused by pressure from swollen lymph nodes – for example, pain in an area such as the tummy (abdomen).
- Non-painful swelling in the neck, armpit or groin.

Other symptoms:

- Drenching night sweats
- Weight loss
- Swelling in one or more areas of the body
- Non-painful swelling in the neck, armpit or groin
- High temperatures of 38 degrees for no apparent reason
- Tiredness
- Itching all over the body

If you notice any symptoms or changes that you're at all concerned about, [get checked by your GP as soon as possible.](#)



Lung cancer

The lungs are part of the respiratory system – this includes the nose, mouth, trachea (windpipe), left and right bronchus (airways or pipes to each lung) and the lungs themselves. The lungs are divided into sections called lobes: the right lung is divided into three sections called the upper, middle and lower lobes; the left lung is divided into two sections called the upper and lower lobes.

Lung cancer can start in the trachea (windpipe), the main airway (bronchus), or the lung tissue. Cancer that starts in the lung is called primary lung cancer, and there are two main types of primary lung cancer: non-small cell lung cancer, and small cell lung cancer – the most common of which is non-small cell lung cancer.

Primary lung cancer differs from cancer that spreads to your lungs from elsewhere in your body. This is called secondary lung cancer, or metastatic lung cancer.

Common risk factors for lung cancer



Smoking tobacco is the most common cause of most lung cancers (accounting for 70% of cases in the UK), and the biggest risk factor. This includes smoking cigarettes, cigars and pipes. People who do not smoke can still develop lung cancer, but their risk is much lower. Lung cancer is also more common in older people.



If someone stops smoking, their risk of developing lung cancer reduces over time. After about 15 years it is almost the same as a non-smoker.

Other causes or risk factors include:

- Exposure to radon gas
- Exposure to certain chemicals in the workplace
- A family history of lung cancer
- Certain treatments for other types of cancer



Common symptoms of lung cancer

- Having a new cough for three weeks or more, or a cough most of the time
- Getting out of breath doing the things you used to do without a problem
- Coughing up phlegm (sputum) with blood in it
- An ache or pain in the chest or shoulder
- Recurring chest infections, or a chest infection that doesn't get better
- Loss of appetite
- Feeling tired all the time (fatigue)
- Unexplained weight loss

Lung cancer does not always present with symptoms in its early stages. Many of the signs and symptoms can also be caused by other medical conditions, but finding lung cancer early can result in a better chance for treatment to work.

If you notice any symptoms or changes that you're at all concerned about, it's important get checked by your GP as soon as possible.



Oesophageal cancer

The oesophagus (gullet) is part of the digestive system, which is sometimes called the gastrointestinal tract (GI tract). The oesophagus is a muscular tube that connects your mouth to your stomach.

There are two types of oesophageal cancer:

Squamous cell carcinoma: This develops in the thin, flat cells of the mucosa, which line the oesophagus.

Adenocarcinoma: This develops from glandular cells and is often linked with Barratts Oesophagus.

There are other rarer forms of oesophageal cancer not covered in this information sheet.

Most common symptoms of bladder cancer

- > The most common symptom of oesophageal cancer is the sensation of not being able to swallow properly, or food getting stuck in your throat or chest.

If you notice any symptoms or changes that you're at all concerned about, get checked by your GP as soon as possible.

Leukaemia

Leukaemia is cancer of the white blood cells, which are the cells that help in fighting infection. There are four main types of leukaemia, and one less common type:

- > Chronic Myeloid Leukaemia (CML)
- > Acute Myeloid Leukaemia (AML)
- > Chronic Lymphocytic Leukaemia (CLL)
- > Acute Lymphoblastic Leukaemia (ALL): This condition needs to be treated urgently
- > Hairy Cell Leukaemia: This is a less common type of leukaemia

Some types of leukaemia are slower growing and do not require treatment straight away.

Common symptoms of Leukaemia

- > Recurrent infections
- > Generally feeling unwell and rundown
- > Having a constant sore throat or mouth
- > Having a fever or high temperature
- > Bruising
- > Bleeding
- > Red spots on the skin – petechiae (little blood blisters)
- > Unexplained weight loss
- > Aching joints and bones
- > Lump in the left-hand side of the tummy (the spleen)
- > Visual issues and headaches

If you notice any symptoms or changes that you're at all concerned about, get checked by your GP as soon as possible.

Transgender or non-binary screening information

[NHS population screening: information for trans and non-binary people - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/nhs-population-screening-information-for-trans-and-non-binary-people)

If you need any further advice or guidance around cancer, its symptoms, or its treatments, our Cancer Nurse Specialists are here to help.

