



Cancer: Know the Warning Signs

Even if we are conscientious about our lifestyle choices, we will not be able to prevent all cancers. Since you know your own body better than anyone, learn to pay attention to how you are feeling, and notice any changes that could mean cancer.



WHAT ARE THE EARLY WARNING SIGNS FOR CANCER?

The National Cancer Institute lists the following warning signs for cancer:

- Change in bowel or bladder habits
- A sore that does not heal
- Unusual bleeding or discharge
- Thickening or lump in breast or elsewhere
- Indigestion or difficulty swallowing
- Obvious changes in a wart or mole
- Nagging cough or hoarseness

What should I do if I suspect something may be wrong?

Even though it might seem frightening, contact your doctor right away and discuss your concerns, and rule out other potential causes of questionable signs and symptoms. Beyond prevention, early detection is a major defense against cancer.

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What can I do to spot cancer early?

In addition to knowing the early warning signs, frequent checks can help you detect cancer early. You can perform the following screening exams on yourself, as recommended by The American Cancer Society:

- **Women** should do monthly breast self-exams. Check for signs of puckering, dimples, changes in size or shape; feel for lumps, thickening or other abnormalities you have not noticed before.
- **Men** should do frequent testicular self-exams. Check for lumps, swelling, hardness, changes in size or position, or other abnormalities you have not noticed before.
- **Watch for changes** in shape, size, color, number and thickness of moles. (A helpful tip is to remember the alphabet – **ABCD** – changes in **A**symmetry, **B**order, **C**olor and **D**iameter).

In addition, follow the recommendations of The American Cancer Society and your own doctor for cancer screening: *(NOTE: Depending on your individual risk factors, your doctor may recommend earlier or more frequent screenings.)*

Women:

- **Mammography:** Yearly for age 40 or older.
- **Clinical Breast Exam:** Yearly for age 40 or older.
- **Pelvic exam:** Yearly for age 18 or older, or those women who are sexually active.
- **Pap test:** Yearly for age 18 or older, or those women who are sexually active.
- **Sigmoidoscopy:** Every five years for age 50 or older, with fecal occult (hidden) blood test (FOBT) and digital rectal exam (or colonoscopy every 10 years, at discretion of the physician).



Men:

- **PSA (Prostate Specific Antigen):** Yearly for age 50 or older. For those at high risk (African-American, those with family history of prostate cancer), yearly starting at age 45.
- **Digital rectal exam (DRE):** Yearly for age 50 or older, or at age 45 for those at high risk (See PSA).
- **Sigmoidoscopy:** Every five years for age 50 or older with fecal occult (hidden) blood test (FOBT) (or colonoscopy every 10 years, at discretion of physician).

Cancer can be a difficult subject to face. Fortunately, we have the means to understand how to choose a sensible lifestyle, eat a healthful diet, pay attention to our environment and our bodies, and to seek appropriate medical advice and care. And, despite this vigilance, some people who practice all of these healthy habits will still get cancer. Early detection is the key to successful cancer treatment, and having the knowledge to help with your own care should ensure your best prospects for a long and healthy life.

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