

Gynaecological Cancer

Signs, symptoms and testing



Key signs and symptoms

01

Unusual vaginal bleeding or discharge

02

Persistent bloating, feeling full or nausea

03

Unexplained lower back, abdominal or pelvic pain

These symptoms can be caused by conditions other than cancer but it's important to get them checked by a GP.

Gynaecological cancer testing basics and next steps

Who is at higher risk for gynaecological cancer?

Anyone with gynaecological organs can develop gynaecological cancer. Risk increases with age. Most cases are diagnosed in people over 50, though younger people can be affected too. Cervical cancer is the exception, most often diagnosed between ages 30 and 45. Inherited gene changes, such as BRCA1, BRCA2, and Lynch syndrome can increase the risk of ovarian and womb cancer.

What if someone has a family history of gynaecological cancer?

People who have a family history of gynaecological cancer, or who have inherited a faulty gene that can increase risk, like the BRCA 1/2, should speak to their GP, who may refer them to a genetic counsellor.

How is gynaecological cancer diagnosed?

If you have signs and symptoms of gynaecological cancer, your GP might refer you to a specialist gynaecology doctor. Tests might include an ultrasound or other scans, a blood test and/or a biopsy.

Are there any other symptoms of gynaecological cancer?

Yes. The key signs and symptoms are listed above, however symptoms of individual types of gynaecological cancer may include:

- **Feeling tired for no reason**
- **Changes to the way you poo or wee**
- **Losing weight without trying or feeling sick**
- **Loss of appetite, feeling full quickly, or indigestion**
- **Bleeding between periods or after the menopause**

These symptoms can be caused by conditions other than gynaecological cancer. However, if these symptoms are new for you or won't go away, you should contact your GP.

When should you contact a GP?

- ✓ If you notice any of the symptoms on page 1
- ✓ If symptoms persist or feel unusual for you
- ✓ If you are at a higher risk for gynaecological cancer
- ✓ If you feel worried – it's always better to check

55%

Of women aged 25–54 worry about getting cancer in the future

70–80%

Of cervical cancer cases can be prevented by screening

95%

Of those diagnosed with stage 1 ovarian cancer will survive for five years

Common myths about gynaecological cancer

Myth "I'm too young to get gynaecological cancer"

Fact While most women who get gynaecological cancer are over 50, it can affect younger women as well.

Myth "There is a screening programme for gynaecological cancer"

Fact There are no national screening programmes for gynaecological cancer – only cervical screening that detects types of HPV that can lead to cell changes.

Myth "I have a family history of gynaecological cancer, so I will definitely get it"

Fact If you have a family history of gynaecological cancer or have inherited a faulty gene, your GP or a genetic counsellor can help assess your risk

Myth "A cervical screening test detects gynaecological cancer"

Fact While the nurse who performs the test can check the health of the vagina, cervical screening only checks for the HPV virus.

Myth "HPV causes ovarian cancer"

Fact HPV is linked to cervical cancer, vaginal and vulval cancer, but not to womb and ovarian cancer.

Myth "There are very few early warning signs of gynaecological cancer"

Fact Most gynaecological cancers do have early signs, including unusual bleeding or discharge, bloating or nausea, and back or pelvic pain.