

Cancer Warning Signals

Since many forms of cancer are treatable if the cancer is detected early, it's important to pay attention to all of the possible warning signs. Most of the time, of course, these warning signs are not an indication of cancer; however, it's worth a trip to your health care professional to find out for certain. It could save your life.

The seven warning signs for cancer include:

- 1. A Sore that Doesn't Heal or Continues to Bleed, or a Lump or Thickening on the Skin or in the Mouth.** These could indicate mouth or skin cancers. These sores are often painless, so do not wait until you feel pain before you seek help.
- 2. A Thickening or Lump Anywhere in the Body.** This especially applies to the breast for women and to the testicles for men. When breast cancer is found and treated early, 85 percent of women survive and show no evidence of the disease five years later. That's why women should get into the habit of doing a monthly breast self-examination. Cancer of the testicles is also a common and treatable cancer when detected early, and testicular self-examination is the best hope for early detection.
- 3. Unusual Bleeding or Discharge from any Body Opening.** For example, unusual vaginal bleeding or discharge may be early signs of cancer of the uterus, which can often be cured when detected early. Fortunately the Pap test can find cervical cancer in its earliest and most curable stage, before there are any signs or symptoms.
- 4. A Persistent Change in Bowel or Bladder Habits.** This could indicate cancer of the bowel, prostate, bladder, or kidney. Cancer of the bowel causes blockage in the passage, which can lead to constipation, diarrhea, gas pains, blood in the stool, and rectal bleeding. Any continuing urinary problems—such as difficulty in beginning to urinate, the need to urinate frequently, blood in the urine, and painful urination—could be symptoms of prostate or bladder infection or cancer. However, many men develop prostate cancer without any symptoms.
- 5. A Persistent Cough or Hoarseness.** This may indicate either lung cancer or cancer of the throat, known as laryngeal cancer. In its earliest stages, lung cancer is a silent disease. It gives no warning of its presence and may not even be found by examination. Coughing occurs in some cases, but may not in others. If you have a cough that just “hangs on,” get it checked. Most lung cancers are caused by cigarette smoking, and, unfortunately, most are incurable. In contrast, those with laryngeal cancer have a good chance of a complete cure if they are treated in time. In many cases, symptoms occur at an early stage of the disease, when the tumor is small and local, and can be easily treated. Persistent hoarseness, a “lump in the throat,” soreness in the neck, and difficulty in swallowing may all be symptoms of laryngeal cancer.
- 6. Difficulty in Swallowing or Persistent Indigestion.** These can be symptoms of cancer of the stomach and esophagus.
- 7. Any Change in a Wart or Mole.** Cancer can develop in almost any area of the skin, especially those parts that are often exposed. Skin cancer may appear as a dry, scaly patch; a pimple that persists; an inflamed area with a crusting center; or as a firm nodule. Malignant melanoma, a relatively uncommon cancer of the skin, usually occurs as a dark brown or black, small, mole-like growth. Any mole that becomes larger, bleeds, or becomes an open sore should be considered suspicious.

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