

# BLADDER CANCER. SAME SYMPTOMS. DIFFERENT STORY.

## Community Toolkit



**The same symptoms could mean a different story.**

Contact your GP practice about symptoms that could be bladder cancer.

# Campaign overview

In the UK, over 20,000 people are diagnosed with bladder cancer each year, yet it is still not widely recognised as a common cancer.

RM Partners NHS Cancer Alliance for north west and south west London, in partnership with Action Bladder Cancer UK (ABC UK), is supporting a campaign to help more people recognise the signs and symptoms of bladder cancer and to contact their GP practice early.

The campaign is focusing on people over the age of 50, and those from Black and South Asian backgrounds.

The campaign will run across all 14 boroughs in north west (NW) and south west (SW) London on bus shelters, social media and online search engines and will be supported by local community partnerships activity. The bladder cancer awareness campaign will run from May 2026 until March 2027.

Blood in pee (even just once)

Urinary infection (UTIs) that keeps returning

Pain, burning or stinging when peeing

Peeing urgently or more often than usual

These could be symptoms of bladder cancer. Contact your GP practice.

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SAME SYMPTOMS.  
DIFFERENT STORY.**

# Campaign overview

## The key messages include:

- Smoking is the single biggest risk factor for bladder cancer.
- Symptoms of bladder cancer can be overlooked, particularly in women, as they overlap with the symptoms of urinary tract infections (UTI), especially where blood in pee is caused by a urinary tract infection, or gynaecological issues including menopausal/post-menopausal symptoms.
- Women have a poorer survival rate than men, making early recognition and referral especially important at improving outcomes.
- Increasing symptom awareness will enable patients to consult with a healthcare professional early, meaning there is opportunity for reduced late-stage diagnosis.
- About 80% of people diagnosed with stage 1 bladder cancer survive their cancer for 5 years or more, compared with about 10% of those diagnosed at stage 4.
- When bladder cancer is diagnosed at an early stage, treatment is more likely to be successful.

## The key symptoms to look out for are:

- Blood in pee (even just once)
- Urinary tract infection (UTI) that keeps returning
- Pain, burning or stinging when peeing
- Peeing urgently or more often than usual

## Other symptoms include:

- Losing weight without trying to
- Feeling very tired for no reason and feeling generally unwell

Whilst it is unlikely to be bladder cancer, it's best to see a healthcare professional if you are experiencing any of these symptoms.

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Dr Bushra Khawaja  
GP  
North West London



# Campaign overview

**“Recognising the symptoms of bladder cancer is key to early diagnosis. Unfortunately, some cases can be diagnosed late, leading to worse outcomes. Bladder cancer can be overlooked, particularly in women, where symptoms can be confused as urinary tract infections or gynaecological issues. It’s important to never ignore blood in your urine. Be aware of the signs and visit your GP practice if you have any concerns”.**

Jeannie Rigby  
CEO  
Action Bladder Cancer UK

**“Being alert to symptoms that may be caused by bladder cancer is important, because the earlier cancer is found the much greater the chance of cure. Important symptoms include seeing blood in your urine or symptoms of a urinary tract infection (UTI) that don’t get better or keep coming back, even if you have had antibiotics. The risk of bladder increases as we get older and is more likely in people who have smoked or used tobacco. If you have noticed these symptoms, please visit your GP and discuss your concerns.”**

Dr Lucy Hollingworth  
RMP Deputy Medical Director & NWL Primary Care Cancer Lead

Dr Lucy Sneddon  
RMP SWL Cancer Clinical Director

To download shareable social media assets, visit the campaign website at [SameSymptomsDifferentStory.com](https://www.actionbladdercanceruk.org)

For more information about bladder cancer visit [www.actionbladdercanceruk.org](https://www.actionbladdercanceruk.org) or [www.nhs.uk/conditions/bladder-cancer/](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/bladder-cancer/)

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Dr Brintha Sivajee  
GP  
Richmond



# Risks and causes of bladder cancer

## Smoking

Around half of all bladder cancers are caused by smoking. Smoking any type of tobacco product, including cigarettes, cigars, pipes and shisha, is the biggest cause of preventable bladder cancer in the UK.

Your risk of getting bladder cancer if you smoke is up to 4 times that of someone who has never smoked. People with the highest risk are those who:

- smoke heavily
- started smoking at a young age and continue to smoke for a long time
- have smoked for a long time

### How smoking may increase your risk

Chemicals in tobacco smoke get into the bloodstream. They are then filtered out of the blood by the kidneys and end up in the urine. When the urine is stored in the bladder, these chemicals are in contact with the bladder lining.

Chemicals called arylamines are known to cause bladder cancer. Arylamines in cigarette smoke may be the cause of the increased risk.

## Chemicals at work

Certain types of jobs can cause a higher risk of bladder cancer because of exposure to certain chemicals, such as those who work as within the textile industry, or that involve handling carbon or crude oil.

## Family history

You might have a slight increase in risk of bladder cancer if you have a first degree relative with bladder cancer. First degree means a parent, child, sister or brother.

## Pelvic radiotherapy

You might have an increased risk of getting secondary bladder cancer after having radiotherapy for pelvic cancer before.

## Being overweight

Some research has shown that you may be at an increased risk of getting bladder cancer if you're overweight.

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# What tests or examinations to expect

Your healthcare professional might want to investigate your symptoms further. Below are the tests and examinations you may have.

- A urine dipstick test – to detect small traces of blood (that you cannot see)
- Checks for any discomfort or pain when urinating (often described as a stinging or burning sensation)
- A blood test to check raised white blood cell count

If you are over 60 and have high levels of blood (that you cannot see) in urine and either of the previous points above, you will be referred directly onto a Urgent Suspected Cancer Referral.

If you are under 60, your healthcare professional will obtain further advice and guidance from a specialist.

## To help you prepare for your appointment, tell your GP practice:

- Your smoking status (including passive smoking)
- If you have a family history of cancer, in particular bladder cancer
- Your latest weight measurement
- If you have had radiotherapy for cancer before
- If your job involves working with chemicals

## What does your GP need to know

- If referred, make sure your doctor or healthcare professional has your correct address and telephone number including a mobile number if you have one as the hospital may contact you by telephone.
- If you are unable to attend appointments throughout the next four weeks, please tell your doctor or healthcare professional.
- If you need a translator, have access needs or would like a male or female consultant, please let the hospital know in advance of your appointment.

Your initial appointment with the hospital may be a telephone or video call with a nurse specialist.

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Dr Geetali Sharma  
GP  
Ealing



# Spreading the message

Below are examples of copy that you can use to communicate about this campaign in newsletters, emails, websites and e-bulletins.

**RM Partners North West and South West London Cancer Alliance (RMP), in partnership with Action Bladder Cancer UK (ABC UK), is supporting a campaign to help more people recognise the signs and symptoms of bladder cancer and to contact their GP practice early.**

The campaign is focusing on people over the age of 50, in particular women and those from lower socio-economic groups as they are more likely to experience a late-stage cancer diagnosis. It will also include people in this age group from Black and South Asian ethnic backgrounds, who are already at increased risk of health inequalities.

- Smoking is the single biggest risk factor for bladder cancer.
- Symptoms of bladder cancer can be overlooked, particularly in women, as they overlap with the symptoms of urinary tract infections (UTIs), especially where blood in pee is caused by a urinary tract infection, or gynaecological issues including menopausal/post-menopausal symptoms.
- 1-year survival rates for women are poorer than for men, making early recognition and referral especially important at improving outcomes.
- About 80% of people diagnosed with stage 1 bladder cancer survive their cancer for 5 years or more compared with about 10% diagnosed at stage 4. When bladder cancer is diagnosed at an early stage, treatment is more likely to be successful.

## **The key symptoms to look out for are:**

- Blood in urine (even just once)
- Urinary tract infection (UTI) that doesn't go away or keeps coming back
- Pain when passing urine
- Needing to urinate more often

## **Other symptoms include:**

- Losing weight without trying to
- Feeling very tired for no reason and feeling generally unwell

Whilst it is unlikely to be bladder cancer, it's best to see a healthcare professional if you are experiencing any of these symptoms.

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Dr Navdeep Alg  
GP  
South West London



# Spreading the message

## Suggested newsletter/web copy

Did you know symptoms of bladder cancer can be overlooked, particularly in women?

Symptoms of bladder cancer can overlap with the symptoms of urinary tract infections (UTI), especially where blood in pee is caused by a UTI or gynaecological issues including menopausal/post-menopausal symptoms.

The bladder cancer awareness campaign 'SAME SYMPTOMS, DIFFERENT STORY' highlights key symptoms of bladder cancer and reminds people, especially women, to contact their GP practice early to get their symptoms checked.

The key symptoms to look out for are:

- Blood in pee (even just once)
- Urinary tract infection (UTI) that doesn't go away or keeps coming back
- Pain, burning, or stinging when peeing
- Peeing more urgently or more often than usual

Other symptoms include:

- Losing weight without trying to
- Feeling very tired for no reason and feeling generally unwell

Whilst it is unlikely to be bladder cancer, it's best to see a healthcare professional if you are experiencing any of these symptoms. The same symptoms could mean a different story.

Early cancer diagnosis saves lives.

For more information visit: <https://samesymptomsdifferentstory.com>

#SameSymptomsDifferentStory #BladderCancerAwareness

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Dr Maria Wallace  
GP  
Wandsworth



# Spreading the message

The below can be used to help spread the message across social media

Bluesky / X – please tag @RMPartnersNHS

Instagram – please tag @rmpartnersnhs @actionbladdercanceruk

WhatsApp - for use in your own WhatsApp groups/ channels.

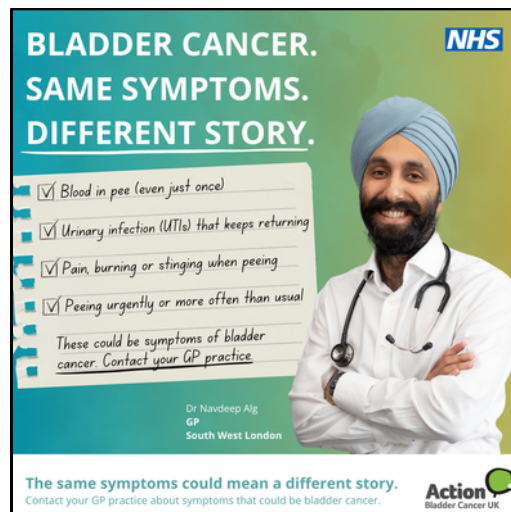
## Suggested post 1:

Know the symptoms of bladder cancer? Could be blood in your pee (even just once), a urine infection (UTI) that keeps returning or pain when peeing. If experiencing any of these contact your GP practice. More info: <https://samesymptomsdifferentstory.com>  
#SameSymptomsDifferentStory

## Suggested post 1:

Over 20,000 people diagnosed w/bladder cancer each year, yet it's not widely recognised as a common cancer. Don't ignore blood in your pee or a UTI that keeps returning. Contact your GP practice. Visit <https://samesymptomsdifferentstory.com> #SameSymptomsDifferentStory

## Example social media assets which can be found online:



To download shareable social media assets, visit the campaign website at [SameSymptomsDifferentStory.com](https://SameSymptomsDifferentStory.com)

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Dr Bina Modi  
GP  
Brent



# Spreading the message

## Instagram & Facebook

Did you know smoking any tobacco product is the biggest cause of preventable bladder cancer in the UK? 45% of bladder cancer cases in the UK are caused by smoking.

When bladder cancer is diagnosed at an early stage, treatment is more likely to be successful.

Please don't ignore the signs:

- Blood in urine (even just once)
- Urinary infection (UTI) that doesn't go away or keeps coming back
- Pain when passing urine
- Needing to urinate more often

Other symptoms include:

- Losing weight without trying to
- Feeling very tired for no reason and feeling generally unwell.

Whilst it is unlikely to be bladder cancer, it's best to see a healthcare professional if you are experiencing any of these symptoms. The same symptoms could mean a different story.

Early cancer diagnosis saves lives.

For more information visit <https://samesymptomsdifferentstory.com>

#SameSymptomsDifferentStory #BladderCancerAwareness

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For more information about bladder cancer visit [www.actionbladdercanceruk.org](http://www.actionbladdercanceruk.org) or [www.nhs.uk/conditions/bladder-cancer/](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/bladder-cancer/)

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Narinder Sinclair  
Advanced Nurse Practitioner  
North West London

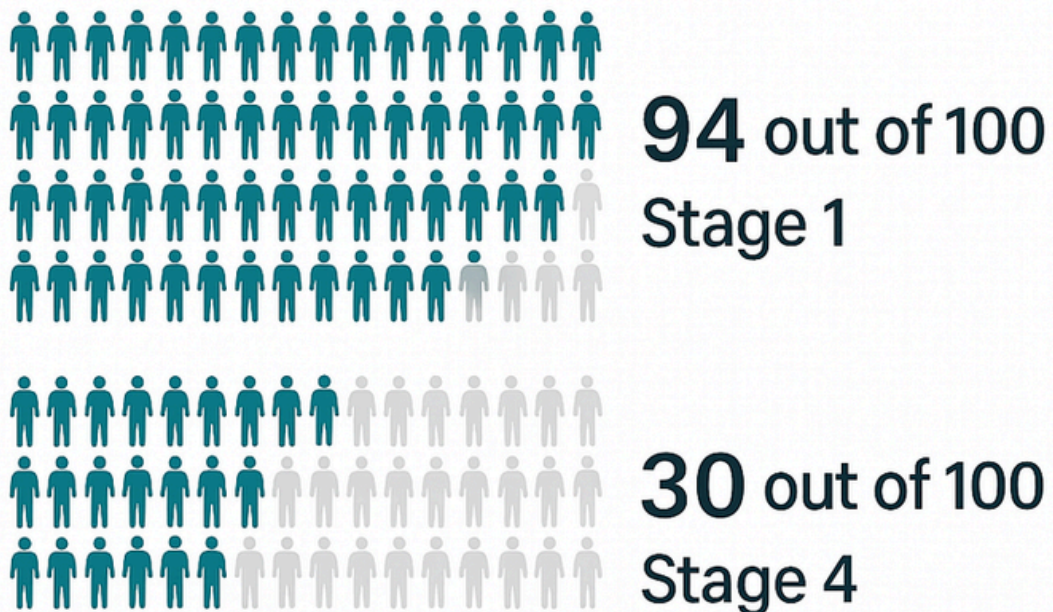


# Additional Information

In England, around 72 of every 100 people diagnosed with bladder cancer in the least deprived group survive their disease for 1 year, compared with around 67 out of 100 of people in the most deprived group (2015-2019).

There is a 14.6% difference in 1-year survival between males (71.2%) and females (56.6%) and a 13.3% difference in 5-year survival between males (46.3%) and females (33.2%) in the most deprived groups between 2015-2019

## Bladder cancer 1-year survival by stage



Source: NDRS-Cancer Survival

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Find out more information at  
[SameSymptomsDifferentStory.com](https://www.same-symptoms-different-story.com)